Wojciech Baluch

# PERFORMING THE MEANING

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# CONTENTS

# DOES THE THEATERGOER NEED MEANING?

To a thus-formulated question most theatergoers would answer in the affirmative. Their convictions about the function of the theatre notwithstanding, they are normally keen to know what a performance is about, what a scene signifies, or what meaning the actions of the heroes convey. Significantly, this sort of curiosity is not indicative of the recipient's naive attitude, manifest in asking the most obvious and worn-out of questions. Ascribing a meaning to a theatrical performance is in most cases a test of its ultimate value. A beautiful performance about nothing in particular is bound to be subject to criticism rather than be greeted with critics' enthusiasm and a positive reception from the audience. And so, although meaning is not solely responsible for the artistic value of a performance, making sense of the actions on stage is normally prerequisite to a favorable verdict on the part of the audience.

On the other hand, however, it is not difficult to notice a cautious attitude towards considerations about the meaning of theatrical performance in contemporary theater practice and criticism. The experiments of twentieth-century theater artists gave priority to actions shaping the relations between actors and the audience, as well as to the notion of the borderline between art and everyday life. Such actions assumed a different form in performances by different directors or theater companies. Spectators were imposed a particular role to act out, e.g. that of the patients of a mental hospital in Grotowski's *Kordian.* On other occasions it was reality external to the theater that entered the world of fiction, as was the case in Meyerhold's *Jutrznie*, where real news from the front line, read by one of the *dramatis personae*, at times turned the performance into an actual revolutionary rally. Similarly, happening performances brought about situations that made the participants wonder about the borderline between theatrical activity and everyday life. For Eugenio Barba, in turn, the most important was the relationship between a theatrical company *and* the culture and society within which his Odin Teatret functioned. One of the most interesting forms of Barba's actors' activity was the so-called barter. Consisting in the exchange of cultural goods, it meant that a group of spectators, having seen a performance, staged their own to reciprocate. When Barba's actors finished their performance, the spectators did not respond with traditional applause, but presented their own show instead. Also, *Odin Teatret* paid attention to the actor's creative process itself. Carried out at the International School of Theater Anthropology, research into dramatic techniques stemming from different cultures bore fruit in performances that, rather than being theatrical presentations, simply showed how actors work.

Interest in the process of dramatic creation in twentieth-century theater was nevertheless still more common, as evidenced by rehearsals open to the public, numerous workshops and joint performances by professional actors and amateurs. The bases for

such developments were varied. Co-operation between actors and people attending a workshop (or usually a series of workshops) could mean the practical implementation of the principles of political theater, create a psychodrama or evoke the ritual origins of the theater. In each case, however, the basic method of activity adopted so as to achieve the goal was the inclusion of the people coming to the theater in the process of performance preparation. Creative activity *per se* thus became more important than the final result in the shape of theatrical performance that could be staged and seen. The treatment of a theatrical creation as a finite and closed presentation was rejected even more strongly by the originators of *performance art*. The spectators did not in this case take an active part in theatrical activity: rather, what they were presented with limited itself to ephemeral and unfinished activities showing the process of constantly renewing the artistic means used by the performer.

The few above-mentioned examples of searching for the nature of theatrical art by no means exhaust either the richness of experiments or the variety of performative patterns defining new frontiers for the theatrical event. Importantly for the present considerations, however, the popularity of such performances, especially in the 1960's and 1970's, resulted in there originating an alternative for conventional theater, where the spectator's main task is to understand and interpret the events of the world presented on stage. And so, despite the fact that everyday theater practice – as Ratajczak (1988) rightly observes – "still consists mainly in staging dramas", the popularity of attempts at ritualizing theater or looking at it from the viewpoint of anthropology, sociology or politics has for many created an opportunity to question the value and aim of reflections on the meaning of the events on stage. Apparently, such reflections should be treated as secondary to the study of the nature of the theater itself. The rejection of meaning and concentration on common experience, direct actions or the state of man in society, can be accepted as a kind of aesthetics. At the same time, however, questioning the need for reflection on the meaning of theatrical actions is contrary to the assumptions posited by the artists themselves who had been seeking new directions in twentieth-century theater. In many cases, reflection on meaning was after all an important part of the theatrical explorations taking place since the 1950's. What is more, it seems that only focusing on issues to do with the organization and affective reception of a performance, as well as its function in society, often constitutes not an alternative, but rather an alibi that frees the spectator from the effort involved in having to interpret the actions on stage. A handy alibi at that, for criticism of the need to reflect on the possible meanings in most cases does not result from the aesthetic attitude of the recipient, but from the specificity of theatrical experience itself. It is so because if we reject a situation in which a given theatrical aesthetics questions on principle the function meaning plays in the reception of a performance, it turns out that doubts over the value of an analysis or interpretation of a performance come as a result of a trite observation. Namely, asked for opinion about a performance, the spectator often finds it difficult to describe clearly what it was about. On the other hand, he/she is keen to express his/her elation or disapproval, and sometimes also willing to talk about the emotional experiences caused by the actors' interpretation of their roles or by the stage scenery. Yet, such a basis is not enough to form the conclusion that spectators watch plays without actually understanding them. What seems to be certain is that, just after watching a performance, they often have problems verbalizing their reflections in a way that would demonstrate their understanding of what they have seen a short while

back. Yet the reasons for such problems do not lie with lack of comprehension, but rather with problems the spectators have remembering the developments on stage, their inability to verbalize their observations and corresponding emotions, as well as difficulty with interpreting the sense of the performance as a whole. When speaking of understanding a performance, we in most cases mean the interpretation of its global sense. At the same time, the process of understanding the actions on stage is normally fragmentary in nature and it is often only after the spectator left the theater that a reflection is born that allows to capture the sense of the performance as a whole. However, the inability to consolidate particular emotions and form conclusions does not mean that the spectator has not understood a single scene. Therefore, if one wants to define the function of comprehension processes in the reception process of a theatrical performance, it is necessary to concentrate on interpretations of fragments of a play only. Unfortunately, also in this case problems appear to do with the aforementioned unreliability of human memory and inability to verbalize one's observations and corresponding emotions.

Let us take a scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Duncan expresses his delight at the beauty of the surroundings of Macbeth's castle. It is easy for the spectator to notice irony of the situation: in the next scene of the play the hosts, Lady Macbeth and her husband, plot to murder the king. After that Duncan's delight can be forgotten with no consequences for the understanding of the unfolding developments of the tragedy. And so, if the spectator cannot interpret a given scene after the performance has finished, it does not mean that he/she was watching it without comprehension. What is more, understanding the irony present in *Macbeth* does not have to be on a par with the ability to describe or name the technique used by the author of the play. The spectator can be aware of the opposition between Duncan's positive reception of reality and the tragic fate that has been planned for him, and at the same time be unable to verbalize his/her emotions and observations.

The situation gets more complicated when apart from the plot we consider a number of significant elements of the staging. Any attempt at interpreting a fragment of a performance requires not only capturing the sense of the events on stage, but also the ability to describe both the actions of the *dramatis personae* and the stage scenery in a way that would support the interpretations made. Yet, in contrast with literary art, where it is always possible to use a quotation, in the case of theater, and also cinema, the analysis has to be based on an accurate linguistic characterization of the actions presented on stage. Thus the difficulty with interpreting those actions appears still at the level of description of a theatrical performance. Moreover, the unreliability of human memory impedes any scrupulous analysis of scenes seen some time before. In contrast with the reception process of literary or cinematic creations, returning to a chosen fragment of a theatrical performance is considerably more difficult and normally means having to see the whole of it again.

The problem does not then lie with the fact that spectators do not notice the meanings contained within a performance, but is connected with difficulty in remembering and describing them after the actors left the stage. Such a situation calls for a specialist who could explain the global sense of the performance, most probably a semiotician, for it was semiotics that dominated twentieth-century research into the interpretation processes to do with theatrical meaning. As practice demonstrates, however, coherent semiotic analyses and ones that are consistent with the actions presented on stage, are

not always welcome by the audience, who expects from the theater critic an explanation of just what it is that determines the value of the performance. For many contemporary researchers this fact constitutes a basis on which to "criticize the idea of treating the art of theatrical performance as an ability to express meanings with signs. In place of semiology they propose intuitive research, which could capture the essence of the elusive, and so allegedly »nonsemiotic« spheres of a performance treated as a living presence" (Pavis 1998: 466). At the same time, Derrida's deconstruction or Lyotard's concept of "energetic theater", both originating from the rejection of semiotic research, are even more vague to an average spectator than the semiotic approach, and it is highly debatable whether interpretations based on the analysis of signs are incomprehensible to the audience. The reason why solutions provided by traditional semiotics are rejected does not normally lie with the intricacy of the exposition, but rather with the lack of connections between the emotions experienced by the recipient and conclusions based on a conventionalized system of meanings.

That is why new theoretical models are looking for a method that would most of all allow for how a performance affects the spectator. Contemporary semiotics is concerned with the process of constructing meaning by the recipient. An expansion of the semiotic perspective has been Martin and Sauter's (1995) idea, based on hermeneutics and presented in their book *Understanding Theatre*. The starting point for understanding a performance is the familiarity with relevant codes; this familiarity is examined by Martin and Sauter within a broader reception perspective. Every spectator, making use of his/her own experience and knowledge, chooses from among the universe of signs those elements that he/she feels to constitute the keystones providing a meaning to the actions on stage. An analysis of the spectator's inclinations to recognize particular signs and signification systems constitutes a basis for identifying individual strategies of decoding and constructing meanings (*ibidem*).

The attitude of the spectator is analyzed also by Keynar (1998), who, in his model of reception, makes references to phenomenology. That is why he concentrates on the intentional aspect of performance as the one that should be captured by the recipient. At the heart of Keynar's model are three complementary reception strategies characteristic of an "implied reader". The first of those, S1, consists in uncovering the conventions responsible for creating the reality on stage, thanks to the hints contained in the system of relevant techniques used by the authors of a performance. S2, using predominantly the affective aspects of reception and modifying the assumptions adopted by the recipient at the S1 stage, makes it possible to identify the intentionally assumed subject of the performance, which acquires its definitive sense as a result of S3. S3 in turn consists in capturing the relation of S2 to S1. Keynar's model thus demonstrates how the authors of a performance can reinterpret the meanings connected with a dramatic text. Characteristic of the model is that it takes into account the affective aspects of actors' influence on the audience as well as of stage scenery – according to S2, the recipient's understanding of the subject of a performance is closely linked to his/her emotional attitude towards the reality on stage. Keynar uses the example of Omri Nitzan, an Israeli director, who used present-day reality of the Israeli state as a background in his staging of Goldoni's *The Servant to Two Masters*. This rather overused dramatic method nevertheless acquires a significant sense when considered from the point of view of the emotions it provoked among the Israeli audience. According to Keynar's interpretation, the violent and hostile reality of Goldoni's *commedia*

*dell'arte*, was an instantiation of the paranoid trauma borne out of the Holocaust experience and threat of terrorist attacks. True to fact, the spectators aware of the reality of life in Israeli society could easily identify the director's staging intention, but nevertheless it would have been difficult for them to get as emotionally involved as those whose reception of the performance was based not only on the information obtained, but also the personal, everyday experience of living under the threat of a terrorist attack as well as on the ever-present memory of the Holocaust.

A further solution has been put forward by the French semiotician Patrice Pavis, who refers a description of a theatrical performance understood as a set of metaphorical and metonymical operations to mechanisms characterized in Freud's psychoanalysis. Aware of the spectator's mental activity, Pavis sees the process of performance reception as functioning within the four mental operations that Freud identified as representative of the process of fantasizing. The first of them, "condensation", is based on the accumulation and combination of images. Pavis mentions Johan Kresnik's *Ulrike Meinhof*, a drama whose ending has a meaning that stems from juxtaposing three parallel sets: one where the heroine has been reduced to an old sepia picture from a newspaper, one in the middle of the stage, where the same heroine stood having struck the pose of a statue, and finally that of a background filled with the twisted bodies of prisoners lying at the foot of the smashed Berlin Wall (Pavis 1992). The second operation, "displacement", replaces one element with another not on the basis of similarity, but a direct spatial connection or temporal sequence. In the ending of Kresnik's production one can also notice that the newspaper photograph of the tortured Ulrike suggests a transfer of the heroine's historical persona to contemporary mass media reality, where her body gets reduced to a two-dimensional picture and thus an object whose only destination is in the archives (*ibidem*). Another operation described by Pavis and referred to as "symbolization" consists in showing meanings, playing them out in a symbolic act. Ulrike's body shows both metaphorically and metonymically a state of violence. The heroine's body is controlled, submitted to the action of machines, tortured and manipulated from the outside. The last of Pavis's reception operations, that of "secondary revision", consists in transforming a fantasy in the process of partly ordering chaotic associations, thanks to which it assumes a comprehensible form. This means superimposing a linguistic form on substance without any traces of rational thinking. In his model, Pavis tries to apply the traditional analytic concepts of metonymy and metaphor within Freud's idea of dreamwork. Key for Pavis's considerations is emotional involvement of the spectator, for whom the processes of image combination are merely a basis for the formulation of his/her mental reaction.

The necessity of including the recipient's cognitive activity in the analysis of theatrical meaning is signaled also by other contemporary theater scholars, particularly those advocating sociological theories of theatre. In his *Theater and Recipient*, Kowalewicz (1993) writes about research inspired by the calls for rejecting the traditional model and concentrating on an analysis of meaning production effectuated by the spectator. Similarly, in her *Theatre Audiences* Bennett (1990) makes a reference to the psychoanalytical theory of Norman Holland, who tries to explain the way in which the recipient ascribes meaning to a text and why he/she needs to do that in the first place. According to Holland, both the text and recipients are part of a fantasy and the interaction they enter into determines the meaning of a given work. The fantasy itself can be a source of both pleasure and anxiety, though giving it a linguistic, conceptual

form makes it possible to reduce that anxiety (Holland 1968). Determination of meaning is thus connected with the pleasure of curbing free fantasizing, whose outcome can sometimes provoke apprehension. Holland's theory does not however account for the fact that the same text can be, and often is, interpreted differently by different people. That is why Bennett, speaking of a theatrical performance, points to the pragmatic context that can modify its meaning. A second important aspect of reception she mentions has to do with cultural and social difference, which divide the audience into a number of groups. At the same time, Bennett stresses that such groups are never homogeneous, which calls for research into how the individual recipient understands a performance. Similar ideas can be found in the works of Robert Demarcy, who has replaced the category "audience" with the concept "spectator", Marco DeMarinis (Kowalewicz *op.cit.*), and Maria Shevtsova, whose research demonstrates that differences in reception do not necessarily follow the division into social groups (Shevtsova 1993).

The aforementioned concepts and ideas by contemporary theater scholars point towards the necessity of research into the process of reception; such research should allow for the individual recipient as a co-author of theatrical meanings. A second conclusion has to do with determination of the connection between the spectator's affective reactions and the meanings assuming shape in his/her mind. Unfortunately, as Kowalewicz's (*ibidem*) examples show, empirical research into the individual spectator's signification processes has so far been fruitless. The interview situation is too stressful for the informant and the resulting information about the elements responsible for reception processes is normally invalid.

Solutions allowing to avoid the uncomfortable situation by replacing the interview with an informal conversation, still cannot get rid of the distortions that appear in the process of verbalizing the thoughts in the recipient's mind after a performance. Also fruitless have turned out to be attempts at combining psychological reactions with the process of signification. In line with Kowalewicz's (*ibidem*) conclusion, so far it has been unjustified to claim that any research of the dynamic type has provided a model for proceeding from empirical data to the world of meanings. Thus, none of the aims mentioned above of contemporary theater theory has so far been achieved.

## The cognitive approach to meaning

Searching for the source of the problems that arise when analyses of a theatrical performance attempt to take into account the audience's active role, one has to stress the understanding of meaning that individual approaches have. We tend to equate meaning with conceptual content, which is why even theoreticians who strive to show the relations between affective and conceptual aspects of reception make a distinction between the two areas of the audience's cognitive activity when looking at individual examples. Patrice Pavis, for instance, makes a claim that the tension which comes as a result of watching a performance stems from an interpretation of theatrical signs – and the other way round (Pavis 1992: 107). Earlier in his work though, when he analyses Ulrike Meinhof's self-harming (she cuts off her own tongue), he states that this action requires

no semiological interpretation, being a representation of pain where rhythm and tension play a role (*ibidem*: 106). Even if we concede that in the scene under analysis affective aspects prevail over meaning ones, the question of the relation between feeling and meaning that Pavis proposes is still left unanswered. It may seem, therefore, that the approaches to the category of meaning proposed thus far hinder establishing a relation between meaning and the recipient's emotional reactions. Traditional theories of semantics that dominate contemporary science, after all, aimed at excluding the psychological aspect of reception as a factor beyond objective scholarly formalization.

Cognitive linguistics, which changes our understanding of meaning profoundly by equating it with conceptualization, is in this light an approach worth a mention. Ronald Langacker, who proposed the new definition of meaning, sets new standards in semantics. In Elżbieta Tabakowska's words, he sees a role for semantics in "structural analysis and describing thoughts and concepts, and defines conceptualization in a broad sense of the word as mental experience, comprising both »new concepts and already existing ones, sensual and kinetic experiences, emotions, the ability to recognize an immediate context, social, physical and linguistic, etc.« Conceptual content is thus only one element of meaning, which complements the way the author of a concept formulates the content" (Tabakowska 1998: 168). Clearly, cognitivists see the psychological and subjective facets of cognition not so much as influencing the structure of the concept that profiles a sense, but as an integral part of the sense. Langacker tested the validity of his hypothesis in works that determine the relations that obtain between the grammar of a language and the ability to think and comprehend based broadly on human experience. This dissertation is aimed at demonstrating how the findings of cognitive semantics can help describe how the audience profiles the meanings of a theatrical performance.

In principle, cognitivism stemmed from criticism leveled at the excessive formalism of Noam Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar, and as such is rooted within American linguistics. However, it was an American psychologist, Eleanor Rosch, who set the grounds for the new type of research. Rosch carried out a series of psychological experiments that helped to undermine the then cornerstone of the description of conceptual categories, the traditional categorization. According to it, boundaries between categories were fixed and not transgressible; each element of a category had equal rights, so to speak. The research that Rosch did in the 1970's proved that, in most cases, the above-mentioned model is not compatible with how the human mind goes about arranging the world in reality. Most testees thought that the apple was a more prototypical member of the category "fruit" than, say, the nut. Similarly, the dove was considered to be more representative for the category "bird" than the ostrich or the penguin. As the experiments progressed, a circular cognitive system developed. Radial structures contain central elements which are prototypes of a category; the other elements are included on the basis of their similarity to the prototype. Consequently, one could speak of the degree to which an element is part of a category, depending on how far from the center it is positioned. Thus, cognitive systems started having the form of a scale; conventionally, language users think that "an apple is more of a fruit than a nut is". As an alternative to binary opposition models, the scalar character of some semantic categories seems to be a more accurate reflection of the continual nature of the stimuli that we perceive. Our world perception, after all, is not limited to binary oppositions or elementary particles.

Another significant discovery that Rosch made was establishing the basic level, which, in Maria Indyk's apt words, "is a specific, privileged member of the vertical hierarchy of categorization levels" (Indyk 1995: 634–635, compare also Lakoff 1987: 46). In the category chain this level is usually a middle one. Thus basic-level categories are basic in four respects:

- Perception: Overall perceived shape; single mental image; fast identification.
- Function: General motor program.
- Communication: Shortest, most commonly used and contextually neutral words, first learned by children and first enter the lexicon.
- Knowledge Organization: Most attributes of category members are stored at this level (Lakoff 1987: 47).

To exemplify, the concept "dog" forms the basic level when compared to its superordinate, that is to say a more general concept ("mammal") and its subordinate, a more specific notion (e.g. "poodle").

The American linguist George Lakoff adopted Rosch's concepts of "prototype" and "basic level" in his novel approach to semantic units. Traditional semantics has it that:

1. Each concept is either an elementary unit in itself or made up of other elementary units in accordance with rules and principles of semantics.
2. A concept's internal structure is entirely based on the rules and principles of semantics that are applied to it.
3. Only concepts deprived of an internal structure carry a direct meaning.

Lakoff's cognitive approach practically dismisses these assumptions:

- Direct meaning applies only to those concepts which belong to the basic level or function as image schemata (both kinds of concepts having an internal structure).
- The internal structure of concepts characteristic to the basic level and image schemata is not entirely dependent on applying principles of semantics.

Both approaches, as we can see, postulate different definitions of meaning. The distinction manifests itself in how elementary units are accounted for. In the traditional approach these units are determined through theoretical speculations; cognitive semantics examines relations that link the conceptual system with human experience. Therefore cognitivism helps expand the analysis of meaning creation by including certain psychological aspects, perception rules and the knowledge possessed by an individual or shared by a group of recipients; these elements were ignored in previous approaches. This understanding is in accordance with the assumptions of modern theory of theatre.

Lakoff also expanded on the cognitive theory of metaphor. In a book he published together with Mark Johnson titled *Metaphors We Live By* he states that our day-to-day thinking is largely metaphorical in character, and that reasoning is based on metaphorical implications and conclusions; thus our daily rationalism requires imagination. Secondly – this is quite aptly put by Tomasz Krzeszowski in his introduction to the Polish version of Lakoff and Johnson's work – "thus far nobody had been able to give sufficient grounds to the theory that metaphors are not picked out randomly, but are deeply rooted in our experience, making up coherent systems centered around certain concepts that are structured only due to the fact that we understand them through metaphors. […] Thirdly, the authors are interested in the kind of language we use instinctively. »Our metaphors characterize us«, or, to put it even more bluntly, »show me your metaphors and I'll tell you who you are«" (Lakoff, Johnson 1988: 8). This light-hearted

approach to Lakoff and Johnson's thesis is indicative of the potential behind a cognitive analysis of metaphorical expressions. In the work under analysis here a shift of focus is clearly observable, from meaning forms that make up a coherent and objective system to a mental sphere delineated by everyday existence. In theatre studies, this shift corresponds to the tendency toward anthropology that we are witnessing at the moment (Dobrochna Ratajczak comments on it as she discusses historical drama). Ratajczak notes that "the shift is particularly noticeable in topics dealt with. A contemporary historian will study the concepts of paradise, purgatory and hell, discuss the history of confession, marriage, parenthood, purity, dirt, famine, delve into individual microstories. What was a non-concept in old-time narratives, or at best perfunctorily treated in footnotes, tersely described as typical of a society or a historical period, has developed an identity of its own – and made an impact on the current narrative style […] Blood, pain, tears, sperm come to the fore; death is no longer hidden behind a number or a laconic remark. An upward view complements a downward one; body and soul unite in descriptions of fare, attire, beliefs, mentalities" (Ratajczak 1999: 12). Most importantly, though, the microstories that Ratajczak mentions manifest themselves in day-to-day metaphors that Lakoff deals with. Thus we have access to what has so far been "a non-concept or perfunctorily treated in footnotes".

A third cornerstone of cognitive semantics is what Ronald Langacker proposes. Langacker, who has already been mentioned, has set the grounds for cognitive grammar. The issue may not be as captivating as the new conceptual system or the theory of metaphor; however, Langacker's works have been as exhaustive as possible about the relations that hold between language (in this case grammar in particular) and mental processes. Langacker, along with other advocates of cognitive linguistics, has managed to confirm the hypothesis that language finds motivation in cognitive processes. However, a complete insight into how meaning is shaped has to take into account the relations that obtain between reality and human cognition. Thus all the three stages of human cognitive activity are thoroughly characterized; they can be anthropocentrically shown as follows:

perception (reality) – conceptualization (cognition) – symbolization (language)

The language-oriented works referred to above emphasize the relations that hold between conceptualization and language symbolization; perception is of secondary interest. In turn, studies of the meaning of a theatrical performance consider the other relation, that is perception – conceptualization, to be the key concept. That is why the theoretical model presented in this dissertation will be based on Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson's (1986) relevance theory; this approach is an alternative to the traditional model of communication. The traditional approach is founded on encoding and decoding a symbolized message; according to Sperber and Wilson, meaning occurs as a result of inference due to the sender's ostension. Thus the process of decoding symbols is substituted for by interpretation of data that are highlighted due to acts of ostension, which constitute part of the surrounding reality. Sperber and Wilson's model is based on a set of premises that are necessary to formulate our thesis concerning the ostensive-inferential model of communication. First of all, the authors of the theory of relevance do not attempt to define communication, but rather to describe how it works. They claim that communication is based on heuresis rather than infallible algorithms.

In line with that, communication can hardly be correct or incorrect, but rather successful or unsuccessful. Communication is based on acts of ostension on the part of the sender, which change the recipient's cognitive environment in a noticeable way. As ostension triggers the process of looking for relevance (according to a fundamental assumption of the theory under analysis), the recipient's mind initiates inference aimed at determining which meaning is relevant in a given situation. This, in brief, is how the ostension-inference model of communication works; we will implement it in this thesis to demonstrate how a theatrical performance acquires meaning through audience activity.

## 1. CREATING MEANING IN THE THEATRE

Our theory has it that communication is a process that directly affects the recipient, not necessarily through a system of symbols. Communicative activities trigger intentional thought patterns in the recipient's mind. However, for the recipient communicative intention is but one context to consider in order to correctly interpret incoming stimuli. In theatre, the concept becomes even narrower in scope, as the addressee (an actor, the director, or the whole cast?) cannot be unequivocally determined. It is therefore sensible to treat a theatrical performance as a set of meaningful facts with the odd signal as to the addressee's intention. To investigate the sense of a performance, therefore, is a little like grasping the meaning of the continual chain of events around us rather than meticulously interpreting the intention behind the addressee's action. Naturally, not every kind of theatre is subject to such reception, which is why I would like to concentrate on illusory theatre, where the main objective is to create fictitious reality on stage. In this research illusory theatre serves as a paragon of theatrical activity. It has to be noted here that drama based on fiction is for western Europeans the main genre that shapes their understanding of theatre in general. It is not that a visit to the theatre is only about experiencing the story shown on stage. However, the importance of stage events is, in Zbigniew Raszewski's apt words, that "the only reason why a portraying world should exist is to produce the portrayed one" (Raszewski 1991: 124). In line with Raszewski's reasoning, in order for the audience to appreciate the acting or the aesthetic value of the set, they first have to be entangled in the plot shown on stage. Even if the plot is not the main point behind a given *mise en scène*, it is largely an attention-getter. A plot which is unattractive, incomprehensible or not worth the time and effort of going to see the given play usually means that the other facets of the play will not suffice to keep the audience on their seats for two hours – the average time of a theatrical performance.

In this work the main interest is the process of giving meaning; in line with the basic assumptions of cognitivism it comprises all the three aforementioned aspects of reception, viz: focusing on events shown on stage (through acts of ostension), comprehension (through conceptualisation) and regarding conclusions as pertinent (relevance). These stages have structured the dissertation as it is now, divided into three main sec-

tions. The first chapter tackles the issue of ostension understood as focusing the audience's attention both on the performance as a whole and its individual elements. Chapter two analyses the function of main cognitive domains in shaping meaning in the recipient's mind. The third chapter concerns relevance and metaphor which anchors a theatrical image in the recipient's experience. Each chapter starts with an introduction, tackles the theoretical background behind each of the three issues and sets a conceptual framework. Subsequently, there are analyses where the cognitive mechanisms under discussion are implemented and the specificity of their functioning as part of theatrical reality is discussed. The first two chapters are supplemented with methodological propositions that indicate how the findings can be used in experimental research into theatrical reception. The model proposed here is largely based on analysing reviews, by means of which preliminary hypotheses as to features of individual acts of theatrical comprehension can be formulated. Our critical analysis, though, does not limit itself merely to direct interpretations; it is hoped that also unconscious meaning-forming mechanisms can be arrived at. This approach is based on a documented assumption that largely unconscious mental processes lie at the source of language forms (Lakoff 1999: 13). By and large, reviews by professional critics are under analysis here. Although professionals and ordinary theatre-goers apply different perspectives when looking into performances, cognitive mechanisms in both cases are largely the same.

The arrangement adopted in the thesis is due to its main objective, that is to describe the process of assigning meaning to elements of a theatrical performance in the spectator's mind. A cognitive model of the process in question makes it possible to supplement the conceptualisation of meaning that we tend to have with psychical and affective aspects that determine individual reception of a performance. In such a broader perspective meaning becomes part of the audience's actual theatrical experience; thus comprehension and emotional reactions become one. In search of correct interpretations of performances one cannot rely exclusively on fixed analytical mechanisms and the recipient's minimum range of knowledge. A mere interpretation of meanings done by professionals in the field cannot be significant unless it is accompanied by the recipient's individual impressions and beliefs, as well as his reactions to the play. The audience need only such meanings that can convince them of the compatibility of the events on stage and their own experiences; otherwise they will not bother to come to the theatre at all.

# I. OSTENSION

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Ostension according to theater scholars

Among the stages of the cognitive process mentioned in the previous chapter, one in particular attracts the attention of the theater scholar: the category of ostension, or "behavior in which the sender makes clear his/her intention of showing something to the recipient", as Sperber and Wilson, the authors of relevance theory, define it. The emergence of a meaning (semiosis – in semiotic terms, or conceptualization – within the cognitive approach) has thus been complemented with extraverbal acts such as movement or gestures, which constitute a more typical example of behavior than spoken utterances. In this case, they do not result from the context of an utterance, but directly create meanings through a form of behavior, which in the theater manifests itself in the actions of actors on stage.

The singular role of ostension acts in the theater is confirmed by the works of contemporary semioticians, who often refer to the concept of ostension as a basic way of creating meanings on stage. In one of his books, fundamental for the theory of the theater of the 1980's, Elam (1980: 29) puts emphasis on the ability of theater to use "the most »primitive« form of signification", i.e. ostension. He goes on to explain that "in order to refer to, indicate or define a given object, one simply picks it up and shows it to the receiver of the message in question" (*ibidem*). Apart from defining, the showing of an object can also serve as a communicative act, as in the case of a person ordering beer holding up an empty glass. Elam makes it clear that the glass is not the actual referent, but refers to a class of objects of which it is a member. In this way, the semiotic rule gets implemented, according to which an object, in order to be identified as a sign, should provide information about something external to it. By thus incorporating acts of ostension in semiotization, Elam makes signification through ostension one of the basic distinctive features of a theatrical performance, one distinguishing theatrical art from narrative forms. Following Eco, Elam points to the rather obvious fact that the semiotization of a performance is based mainly on the showing of objects and events to the audience, whereas the same function is in narratives played by description and recounting. The distinction between theatrical performance and narrative bears resemblance to the two representational modes distinguished by Aristotle,

namely *diegesis* and *mimesis*. Drawing from this analogy, Elam concludes that "mimesis is […] equivalent to definition through ostension" (*ibidem*: 112). The issue is treated slightly differently by another well-known semiotician, Patrice Pavis, who – distinguishing theater from among other art forms making use of fiction – stresses the fact that on stage the world of a drama is presented by means of imitation (*mimesis*) and ostension. Pavis thus dismisses the categorical parity between imitation and ostension as postulated by Elam. The lack of a precise definition of ostension is one reason why the concept, though often used in research as an important element of the theatrical presentation process, has so far remained largely unexplored in relevant literature. Theater studies researchers most often follow in Elam's footsteps and use the term "ostension" interchangeably with the familiar notions of presentation (showing) and mimesis, attempting no explanation whatsoever of its special function in the construction of on-stage reality.

An attempt at incorporating ostension acts in the broader context of communication process has been made by Eco, who, like Elam, sees ostension as equivalent to showing. Eco, however, at the same time tries to explain its function in the process of communication, including in his analysis the pragmatic context accompanying an act of ostension. He refers to Charles Peirce's example of a drunkard put on public display by the American Salvation Army to commend the benefits of temperance (Eco 1997: 116––117). Peirce's aim was to find out what kind of a sign the drunkard was. Having explained that – in line with the rules of semiotics – an intoxicated man should not be treated as a concrete person but a sign of drunkenness, Eco goes on to interpret the ostentatious presence of the drunk, put on a platform in the middle of town. He takes into account a number of contexts within which to look into the meaning of such ostentatiousness. And so, if the passers-by know that the drunk has been put on the platform by the Salvation Army as a tool of propaganda, aware of the organization's system of values they will have no difficulty understanding that his presence is a warning against the disastrous effects of intemperance. The necessity of employing a social context, pointing to the intention of the addresser, stems from the fact that the drunk's presence per se does not unequivocally indicate the reason why the event is being staged, and thus makes it impossible to adopt any unequivocal interpretation (*ibidem*). To Eco, the answer lies with the pragmatic context pointing to the Salvation Army as the author of the street event. If, however, the drunk had been put on the platform by a revolutionary movement, rather than a symbol of dissipation he could become a picture showing the consequences of the government's ineffective social policy. Defining the context for ostension in each and every case does not of course preclude the possibility of a varied interpretation of a performance, a street event in this case, but it nevertheless unambiguously predefines the domains for such an interpretation, through, among other things, identifying a system of values constituting an interpretative framework. Demonstrating how the showing of an object or an event takes on meaning in connection with a predefined pragmatic context, Eco's analysis proves that ostension becomes a significant part of the process of communication. It does not, after all, limit itself to simple signification through showing (*deixis*), but is the result of complex interrelations between the activities performed by a performer and the circumstances determining the addresser's intentions.

The issue of the meaning-inducing function of deixis in the theater is also tackled in Martin Esslin's *The Field of Drama* (1987: 38). Esslin views "focusing" as most of all

the capturing of spectators' attention and concentrating it on the most important aspects of the scene. Standing on the balcony, Shakespeare's Juliet, for instance, is highlighted as a character high up above the setting of the stage. This obvious example of highlighting a character makes evident the role of ostension as a device for selecting those elements of the setting that are significant for the performance, and for concurrently arranging stage signs in a hierarchical order indispensable for fully understanding the performance and its message. The need for hierarchization is not, however, limited to the arrangement itself of which particular actors or elements of the set are a part. It is also connected with Tadeusz Kowzan's broader interpretation of the model of theatrical communication, understood as a group of many different semiotic systems. The multi-channel nature of the message sent from the stage imposes the need for introducing some sort of organization that would make it possible to highlight those elements which – capturing the audience's reaction – constitute the primary meaning of a given scene. As Esslin points out, no part of a performance can be analyzed with all the elements on stage and the interdependence between them being taken into account. It is up to the director to decide whether any (or which) of the semiotic systems should preponderate at a given moment (*ibidem*: 112). According to Esslin, a special role in this selection process is played by "key" or "cleft" signs. As "signifying elements of a higher order which determine and affect the way the other sign systems within a given section or passage of a work are to be read, and thus act as indicators of the "»level« at which individual signs are to be perceived" (*ibidem*: 110). A "key" or "cleft" sign can be for example the form of an utterance, as in Shakespeare's dramas, where transition from blank verse to prose indicates a shift onto a more realistic level. Apart from language, Esslin speaks of five other levels of signs capable of defining the modality of a performance or its parts (*ibidem*: 111). These include:

- the general color scheme of a performance,
- the pictorial style of the set, whether realistic or abstract, flat or three-dimensional,
- the cut and period style of the costumes,
- the acting style, whether realistic or grotesque, deeply serious or comedic,
- the mood of the background music.

The modalities of reception determined by Esslin's sign levels do not exhaust all possible interpretative perspectives, for they stem in the main from cultural conditioning. One important conclusion is nevertheless that the distinguishment of sign levels constitutes one of the basic elements of the process of understanding the meanings presented on stage.

The above outline of the role of ostension in theater theory demonstrates that in most of the approaches it is viewed as an act characteristic of a theatrical performance, an act distinguishing a performance from narrative forms of expression. Such an attitude results from equating the act of performing with ostension (whose dictionary definition identifies it as first of all showing). However, the way in which different scholars use the term ostension in the more detailed of their analyses, clearly shows the lack of a uniform understanding of the concept. Elam views ostension as mostly an indication of mimesis of theatrical art. For Eco, ostension is additionally a manifestation of communicative intention of necessity taken into account in order to rightly interpret the ambiguous act of "showing" a given object or event. Esslin in turn endeavors to solve the problem of the ambiguity of theatrical images by introducing a hierarchy into

the meanings sent from the stage. That is why he concentrates on the act of focusing, whose task it is to highlight particular elements making up the primary meaning of a scene. Also related to ostension are Esslin's "key" or "cleft" signs. In this case, however, he does not mean the focusing on a real element of on-stage reality, but the selection of a modality determining to a certain degree the way of interpreting particular fragments of the performance.

Such a diversity of using the notion of ostension provides much to ponder for, given the views presented above, we would be in danger of complacency if we merely accepted Elam's comment that "theatre is able to draw upon the most »primitive« form of signification, known in philosophy as »*ostension*«" (Elam *op.cit.*: 29). The presence of ostension in the process of showing a given modality, as well as its functioning within a pragmatic context demonstrate that it is involved also in more complex communicative acts. That is why, in order to identify the nature of ostension acts, one needs to look also at those texts which analyze the function of ostension in the broader context of communication and mental processes.

## Ostension according to language philosophers

The notion of ostension does not often appear in works on natural language. It was investigated by St. Augustine and Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose ideas nevertheless fall outside the classic model of language thus indirectly confirming the role the category of ostension plays in the creation of a new model of meaning interpretation. Although we do not find any specific conclusions in their works, their considerations and examples are indicative of the fundamental problems regarding ostension, its definition and place in the communication process. They will be used in the present thesis as a basis for conclusions within the framework of cognitive semantics, which is why both St Augustine's and Wittgenstein's ideas have been made part of the considerations of relevance for the final conclusion.

### Can one point to anything else but an object?

In St. Augustine's dialogues the concept of ostension emerges in deliberations on the symbolic character of spoken language. The assumption that a word is a sign triggers the question whether words are capable of "signifying something". That is why, reflecting on particular meanings, Augustine is unhappy with defining one word by means of another and wants Adeodatus, his interlocutor, to "show [him] the things themselves of which these are the signs" (St. Augustine 1938: 24). The first example in the dialogue is "wall", which rather than described by means of words can be simply pointed to with the finger. Adeodatus agrees, though raising the objection that such a way of identifying meaning can only be applied to names signifying physical objects.

Offered another example, he is forced to refine his conclusion. He agrees that also the red color, which is "a certain quality of a body, rather than a body" can be shown with a finger. Adeodatus eventually accepts that one can show "not […] all corporeal things, but all visible things", and goes on to explain, "For I confess that sound, odor, taste , weight, and others of this sort […] cannot be shown by pointing the finger" (*ibidem*).

The deliberations quoted above might seem quite superficial in relation to the complexity of the communication process, but it is in St. Augustine's remarks that one notices prototypical forms of our thinking about ostension. Adeodatus's first conclusion about the corporeality of shown objects and the subsequent comment about their visibility exemplify a prototypical way of perceiving ostension as the showing of a circumscribed area in visually perceived space. The wall referred to by St. Augustine is just this: a circumscribed element within perceived space, of concrete texture and function. If, however, we extend the notion of three-dimensional space to cover regions of other type, we can assume that we can show anything that constitutes a particular fragment of space. And so, even though we regard color as a quality of an object, it still constitutes a circumscribed region in the space of colors. That is why it is important for an act of showing to be preceded by determination of space within which we want to operate. The sentence, "That is called sepia" (p. 114), accompanied by an appropriate gesture, will only be understood rightly if the addressee is aware of the fact that the noun is to specify a color. Thus, to avoid a misunderstanding, we can say, "This color is called sepia" (Wittgenstein 1968: 25), by which we make it clear to our interlocutor that the showing gesture refers to a given region in the space of colors.

If we can show circumscribed areas of various types of space, the question arises in what way are those regions established. In the case of visual perception of objects it is justified to assume that the prototypical aspect establishing an object in space (which acts as background) is its contour (Eco 1971: 162). Eco claims that contour constitutes merely a graphic convention adopted by people, but he seems to be in error, for, as neurological research proves, the establishing of contours is one of the basic sensory functions of the human visual system. A system of nerve connections amplifies signals from cells located on the border of contrasting light stimuli (Lindsay, Norman 1991: 93). The picture of the world around us is thus divided into regions – separated from each other by contours – still at the stage of visual perception. And so, although we are not aware of the existence of contours in our perception, we choose a region that interests us by showing it. Such a situation demonstrates a typical way of understanding acts of ostension in sensorially perceived space. Interestingly, St. Augustine – for whom cognition was after all based primarily on acts of ostension – extended its scope to mental, i.e. abstract, objects. According to his teachings "[man] is taught […] by means of the things themselves which God reveals within the soul" (St. Augustine *op.cit.*: 64). However, the existence of mental objects need not be related o metaphysical conditions. As cognitive linguistics posits, "the human mind is capable of placing objects, also abstract ones, in a mental space characterized by the same features as are typical of three-dimensional space" (Tabakowska 1995a: 24–25). An interesting validation of this supposition is provided in the Polish language: whereas one of the meanings of the word *okreslać* is that of defining, the verb, derived from *kreslić* ("draw", usually in pencil), can at the same time pertain to contouring itself.

Understood as showing, the process of ostension can thus be treated as an act of choosing a finished object, be it physical or mental. Such a treatment, nevertheless,

excludes ostension from the process of cognition: otherwise we would be faced a situation envisaged by Wittgenstein, who points out that "Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one" (Wittgenstein *op.cit.*: 27). The function of ostension would thus simply be to combine a name with an object having been shown; however, in the context of some other examples analyzed by St. Augustine, this issue does not seem so simple.

## "To point" and "to show"

The lexical items "to point" and "to show" are used interchangeably in some contexts. Yet, in St. Augustine's considerations their use signals a significant shift in types of examples. Whereas pointing is connected with "objects", the word "show" clearly refers to actions. Among "[the] thousands of […] things […] which can be shown through themselves and not through signs" Adeodatus mentions "eating, drinking, sitting, standing, shouting" (St. Augustine *op.cit.*: 25). A similar distinction can be found in contemporary studies of ostension. The "showing" viewed by Elam as equivalent to mimetism, is normally accompanied by such terms as "signification", "deixis" or "index", all of which can be treated as analogous to "pointing". One problem is certainly that the analyses of examples used by contemporary scholars do not enable us to explain just what function a distinction into two types of ostension has in the description of cognition and communication processes. And although this question is not addressed also by St. Augustine, his apt comments as well as doubts regarding the examples he analyses make it possible to draw important conclusions.

## Is it enough "to show"?

By "showing" St. Augustine understands the performance of an activity in order to explain the meaning of a word. It would thus seem that "showing" consists in imitating an activity and therefore Elam's idea of mimesis being of a piece with defining concepts through ostension cannot be contested. St. Augustine's examples, however, demonstrate that an act of imitation per se is not enough to formulate a definition of an ostensive character. What is more, the term "imitation" itself does not make it possible to define relevant elements of an act of ostension. To clarify, let us look into an excerpt from St. Augustine's *Dialogues*:

> "Aug.: Come now, tell me; if I, knowing absolutely nothing of the meaning of the word, should ask you while you are in the act of walking what walking is, how would you teach me?
>
> Ad.: I should walk somewhat more quickly in order that after your question your attention might be directed to something new. And yet I should do only what was to be shown.

> Aug.: Do you know that walking is one thing and hurrying another? […] Hence, if after my question you were to do more quickly what you were doing already, I should think walking to be merely hurrying. Hurrying would be the new thing added, and so I should be misled by that" (*ibidem*: 23–24).

It is rather clear that the misunderstanding between Augustine and Adeodatus is not the result of a faulty imitation of an activity, but stems from conclusions drawn subsequent to an interpretation of a change in an activity. And so, despite the fact that the act of walking was still being carried out, St. Augustine's attention was directed to most of all the increase in pace, which he read as an intention of showing what hurrying means. A crucial element of defining a given meaning is thus not imitation, but rather a change constituting a point of departure for understanding by the recipient the nature of the act being presented. A second important function of a change in behavior is made evident in Adeodatus's summary of the dialogue: "I admit that we cannot show a thing without a sign if we are questioned while we are in the act of doing it. For if we add nothing, the questioner will think that we do not wish to show him and will suppose that, to ridicule him, we are continuing what we are doing" (*ibidem*: 26). It is to the change mentioned earlier that the necessity of "adding something" relates. This time, however, Adeodatus's comment, rather than the meaning-inducing function of ostension, centers on the necessity of signaling the readiness to explain an act that has been enquired about.

The two functions of ostension have been highlighted in Sperber and Wilson's work on relevance theory. They referred to them as an informative and a communicative intention. The former consists in pointing to a piece of information being part of the message, whereas the latter in making manifest to an audience one's intention to give that information. This means that the showing of an object alone, or the imitation of an act, will not fulfill the function of ostensive communication unless the sender is successful in clearly making manifest his/her communicative intention as well as point to those pieces of information that are important at a given moment. Certainly, the meaning of the verb "to show" is one of both pointing and the sender's intention to highlight a chosen fragment of reality. The problem lies with the fact that the concept of ostension is normally dealt with as being in opposition to natural language. That is why "showing" as an act of ostension has been contrasted with spoken word, and why the search for the nature of ostension has been carried out in communication through imitation (mimetism), gestures and images. This distinction is nevertheless not functional, for ostension constitutes a fundamental element of interpersonal communication, the form of such communication notwithstanding. Ostension cannot thus be viewed only in connection with human extraverbal activity. Examples of communicating by means of visual representation merely facilitate the understanding of significant features of an act of ostension.

## Aspect

A simplification of sorts is also the treatment of ostension as a simple act of pointing to particular objects. Even if our perception divides the space being perceived into regions

circumscribed by contours, it does not concurrently make an act of pointing unequivocal, which is owing to the already-mentioned possibility of pointing to different aspects of an object. How can we be sure that the person pointing to a red square with his/her finger wants to attract our direct our attention to the shape of the figure rather than its color? This problem has been addressed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, who enumerated various types and ways of pointing. And so, for example, "you attend to the shape, sometimes by tracing it, sometimes by screwing up your eyes so as not to see the color clearly – you sometimes attend to the color by putting your hand up to keep the outline from view (Wittgenstein *op.cit.*: 28)". Although we cannot be certain whether tracing the contour of a square with our finger will enable the recipient to understand what we mean by saying, "this is a square", Wittgenstein's example shows a way of dealing with the problem. Namely, we can highlight the relevant or hide the redundant features of a concept. The same effect can be achieved by placing an act of ostension in a particular context. Let us imagine that, pointing to a human being, we say, "This is a human". The recipient may understand us in the right way, but might also conclude that the word "human" means, say, "stomach" – if that was where we pointed our finger to. A possible precaution against such a turn of events would be to provide some additional information, e.g. by saying, "This being here is a human". Should we not wish to utilize natural language, we could also point to other beings, giving their names. Such provides an appropriate context, making it possible for the recipient to rightly interpret an act of ostension. A third way of highlighting a significant feature is its repetition in different images. Wittgenstein is wary about the fact that "[t]he definition of the number two, »That is called 'two'« – pointing to two nuts – is perfectly exact. […]", in consequence "the person one gives the definition to doesn't know what one wants to call »two«; he will suppose that »two« is the name given to this group of nuts (*ibidem*: 23). If, however, the word "two" accompanies the act of pointing to two apples, houses, glasses, etc., its meaning will eventually get the right shape in the mind of the recipient. The process of highlighting a given feature through its repetition in subsequent images is interesting because, unlike the other two methods, it does not require any prior knowledge!

## Pointing as a prototype of focusing one's attention

According to the theories discussed thus far, the "pointing with the finger" to real objects appears to be the prototypical act of ostension. However, pointing to the shape or color of an object is not, as Wittgenstein holds, an activity totally different from "[pointing] to this book (not to that one)" or "[pointing] to the chair, not to the table" (*ibidem*: 25), but constitutes a metaphorical extension to the actual act of pointing, which has merely been transferred to a different type of space. The understanding of ostension as an operation performed within mental space also allows to treat Esslin's "key" or "cleft" signs as ostensive acts, pointing to the modalities of the perception of a theatrical performance. Similarly treated can be the defining of a particular context leading to proper interpretation of the function of the drunkard described by Eco. An act of ostension in this case points to the space of social structure.

Metaphorical extensions of the prototypical act of ostension are impeded by ostension acts that cannot be described as acts of pointing to a circumscribed region, or at least its chosen point ("this temperature is just right"), as a representation of a given meaning. What will be pointed to if, eager to explain the meaning of the word "hurry", we begin to walk faster than a moment before? Even if we refer to an inherently abstract conceptual space, we will still be unable to point to the region constituting a representation of the concept "to hurry", because its meaning is based on the changing of a state that can be placed in time and space.

As regards the process of conceptualization, we can speak of choosing a given relation. Still, in what way does the change in behavior suggest relevant elements of the relation responsible for the concept "hurrying"? The moment itself of changing from slow to hurried activity is timeless, and that is why it does not provide timeless boundaries that would circumscribe a single activity characterizable as a sequence of particular activities. It focuses the recipient's attention on both activities and thus forces him/her to look for similarities and differences between both types of behavior, which is exactly how the relation responsible for the meaning of "hurrying" gets activated.

That is why the concept of pointing cannot be treated as a primary act of ostension. It remains a prototypical, i.e. the best, example of ostensive activity, which is most often realized by pointing the finger to a given object. However, the fundamental sense of an ostension act is the concentration of the recipient's attention, which act should be understood as both his/her cognitive activeness and the influence of the environment or the sender's intentional activities drawing somebody's attention. Such a definition covers both the pointing to a region and the focusing of attention around a significant change in state. "Around" because we are unable to define unequivocal temporal boundaries of intensified attention, necessary to construct the relevant relation. The viewer's attention as an important aspect of the reception of a theatrical performance is discussed by Esslin, referring to the selection of a performance's significant elements. For Pavis, in turn, the viewer's attention is connected with the nature of ideological and aesthetic relations. It needs to be stressed, however, that the issue is present in all aspects of reception; at the sensory level our attention can be drawn even by such elements as sound, smell, weight or taste, i.e. qualities that in St. Augustine's *Dialogues* are treated as impossible to be "pointed to with the finger" (St. Augustine *op.cit.*: 24). The definition suggested above thus allows us to subordinate to ostension all those actions, which, going beyond the metaphor of pointing, have a function similar to that of the gesture of an arm stretched out in a certain direction.

In order to elucidate the considerations above, let us begin with reformulating the distinction between pointing and showing and replacing it with **focusing somebody's attention** and **intensifying one's attention**. Such terms allow for the incorporation of a concept fundamental within the psychological theory of cognition – the category of attention. In her book *Intelligence and Cognitive Processes*, Nęcka (1994: 63–65) writes about two elements indispensable for the interpretation of meanings: "maintaining attention" and the related "memory". Particularly important for the present considerations is the crucial role "attention" plays in the process of the selection of stimuli; from a temporal-spatial perspective that role boils down to the choice of a given moment or region in space. Most of all, however, the redefined terms make it possible to give ostension understood as a cognitive category a much broader scope.

The consequences brought about by the new definitions were to be seen in the example of "showing" hurry, where the ostension act consisted not so much in performing ("showing") an action of fixed temporal boundaries, as in intensifying the recipient's attention, which was made possible thanks to a discernible change in the pace of the activity. Similarly, when describing ostension as "directing attention" the object or spatial region which we could unequivocally point to need not exist. It can for example so happen that to the question "What is a frog?" we will answer with the phrase "Look down". The object, a frog in this case, has not been pointed to but the direction of the gaze has been made clear, which leads to the same cognitive effect as pointing to the frog with the finger. What is more, pointing the finger will not always define the object unequivocally. After all, we cannot be sure whether a person stretching out their arm in the direction of the window is explaining the meaning of the words glass, frame or window, or is pointing to the hole in the wall, not to mention to what is beyond it. That is why it is difficult to equate ostension with a pointing gesture unequivocally highlighting the intended object.

The definition of ostension as "the focusing of somebody's attention" is also justified by the etymology of the term itself. But a perfunctory glance at the problem reveals a close relation between the terms ostension and ostentation. Whereas dictionary entries for the former speak of demonstration, presentation and showing, the definitions of "ostentation" emphasize the aspect of attracting attention since it is defined as a way of behavior intended to show, display (e.g. wealth or knowledge) and meant to attract attention. The existence of a relationship between "ostension" and "attention" is confirmed upon examining the etymology of the Latin *ostensio*, which, derived from *ostendere* has got the same root – "tendere" – as the Latin *attendere*, which in turn is akin to the English *attention*. What is more, *tendere* itself means both "stretch, extend" and "make towards, aim at". The term thus contains semantic information of both focusing and directing one's attention. On the other hand, *ostendere* – which can signify both pointing to and showing an object, can also be used in the sense of "displaying" or, figuratively, "putting before one's eyes". In relation to the cognitive processes, it seems justified to broaden the metaphor so as it acquires a more general sense, thus referring to "putting within the scope of one's interest, and thus attention".

The motivation behind equating an act of ostension with an activity meant to attract attention is not limited to philological concerns and the intention to incorporate the term into a model of contemporary cognitive psychology. The main aim of the generalization made is to explain relevant aspects of ostensive acts as elements of communication processes in the theatre. The consequences of adopting a definition going beyond the metaphor of "pointing" that have been discussed earlier can now be complemented with an examination of the order of those human experiences that make up the concept of ostension. Its prototypical understanding as an act of pointing implies a sender, who makes clear his/her intention to highlight a certain object. What is more, such a situation assumes the existence of a code or convention making it possible to point to a chosen object by for example stretching out the arm or using an arrow sign. Meanwhile, such conventions are secondary to the primal experience of the attracting of human attention by phenomena in the surrounding reality, ones that are free from the communicative intention of another person. At the cost of overgeneralization it can be said that every change or movement causes a direct reaction in humans or it triggers the process of interpretation. A basis for human activity, this mechanism is at the same

time a foundation for the sender's ostensive behavior. Introducing suitable changes to the setting of the interaction, the sender can control the intensity and direction of the recipient's attention. As for pointing by stretching out the arm, it most probably constitutes a trained convention, which we get to know in childhood. Eager to point the child's attention to a picture, the parents stretch out their arms in its direction, scraping or tapping their fingers on its surface. It is the accompanying sounds that attract the child's attention; with time, it finds out that he/she should follow the stretched arm with his[*]/her eyes. Experience thus gets conventionalized, which leads to the emergence of a code.

This last example can serve as an introduction to another issue of primary significance to the cognitive process, that of the creation of new meanings. An outstretched arm gets registered as an act of pointing as a result of its frequent concurrence with other activities aimed at attracting the child's attention. This process takes place also in the theatre – where it is as a matter of course much more complex – which makes it possible to create new meanings or, more broadly, also codes characteristic of new trends in stage production. For his semiotic model, Eco has created the term "undercoding" (Elam *op.cit.*: 55), which refers to the moment in the development of new dramatic modes when the rules of generating meanings are known to the audience only approximately. One way of the emergence of new, more precise rules of reception is the repetitive process of focusing the audience's attention on particular elements of the performance, owing to which they get remembered as the elements making up the new aesthetic trend. That is why we often feel fiercely attacked by avant-garde theatres, which, paving the way for future codes and conventions, are forced to make use of radical actions aimed at focusing the recipients' attention on new elements of dramatic art. Significantly, to the audience such actions seem often too intense in relation to the meanings they carry. It is only after some time that particular elements of the new aesthetics gain a deeper meaning, allowing artists to use them in more sublime ways.

## Summary

Summing up the considerations above, it is most of all necessary to note the distinction put forward by some scholars between language or sign communication and "the most »primitive« form of signification" (*ibidem*), i.e. ostension. Such a distinction is unfounded because ostension does is not a type of communication but constitutes its integral part, present also in more complex forms of conveying meanings and information. It plays the key role of signaling communicative intention, thus triggering the process of conceptualization, i.e. an interpretation of the information being communicated or only received. That is exactly why ostension cannot be contrasted with other kinds of signification – it is constantly accompanied by the search for relevancy in the process of inference or decoding. Other key functions of ostension include preliminary selec-

[*] The primary way to attract attention, besides by sound, is through movement, the proof in which an outstretched hand provokes the eyes of the receiver to fall in the direction of the giver.

tion of information, outlining of borders in the process of repetition, signaling the moment of the change of state, and differentiation between figure and background (context). Each can be described in terms of both the perception of physical reality and activities within mental space. This in turn enables us to search for an analogy between the perception of on-stage reality and the process of conceptualization, i.e. interpretation of perceptual data leading to the emergence of meanings.

## 2. OSTENSION IN THEATRE

To assent to understanding ostension as an instance of focusing attention (a central component of the cognitive process) means to question its conventional role as a distinctive feature that differentiates between the art of showing, typical for theatre, and sign-based narrative communication. As it is, acts of ostension leading to focusing attention are communication-universal; they indicate that communication is about to be initiated and help determine the content of the message to enable its interpretation. What is crucial, though, is how ostension manifests itself in various kinds of communication. In natural language, the intention to communicate and the selection of communicative content are strongly conventionalized, which often makes them escape our attention. Relations and hierarchies that hold between individual words fall within the domain of grammar, while communicative intention is an a priori component of the verbal sign. Incidentally, communicative intention is central to all systems of signs. Passing a tree we do not always notice it, but if our traveling companion says "Tree!" we assume there is some intention on their part, or we react, for instance swerve to avoid a log lying on the road. Communicative intention, an a priori part of the sign system, also helps identify certain objects that we perceive as signs, without necessarily having the right knowledge to interpret them correctly. To simplify a little (the details of this process are irrelevant here) let us look at an example. A driver seeing a red circle with a white stroke positioned on a pole along a road may fail to remember what its meaning is, but will certainly interpret it as a road sign and will attempt to investigate what he is thereby obliged to do. Naturally, the driver can easily drive past the no-entry sign, but its presence is in itself an act of ostension. Indifference towards acts of communication, in turn, results from focusing of attention being scalar in character and largely dependent on extra-systemic conditions, pragmatic situation and the recipient's mental state. A sign that is not conspicuous enough will not attract the tired driver's attention, nor will a friend of ours stop to pick us up unless we wave at them enthusiastically enough. The usual comment made afterwards is "I saw someone waving, but I had no idea it was you", or "…you were waving to me". It is so because we tend not to recognize acquaintances or realize that a gesture is addressed to us, even though we notice the person and the gesture, unless the action is explicit enough to make our friend stand out from the crowd. However, one reacts not only to other people's intentional actions, but also to any event that arouses curiosity.

In political theatre, the intention to communicate intended messages directly to the audience is made explicit; an example is Brecht's plays, where songs meant as commentaries on the plot clearly stood out from the other stage events. In theatre of illusion addressing the audience directly is much less frequent. Thus, the audience look at the events taking place as if they were watching extra-theatrical reality. The difference lies in the way theatre arouses interest outside the mere pragmatics of life. By reacting to everyday stimuli one avoids danger or satisfies one's needs, be they mental or physiological. However, theatre experiences do not entail the necessity to react to prevent disaster or to satisfy needs. After all, the audience and the stage are separated, so events of the fictitious world need not directly influence their recipient. Therefore every play must face being ignored, the way we ignore scores of events taking place outside theatre, if they are not directly relevant to us.

Both theorists and practitioners of theatre realize the need to arouse interest in events. Zbigniew Raszewski defines a theatre event as a dynamic, focusing and polarized arrangement. He exemplifies it as a road accident: an extraordinary happening attracts bystanders (the audience, in a sense) who gather at the scene trying to find out about the circumstances. The arrangement whereby rescuers' actions are under observation holds good until the events are no longer interesting for the observers. A theatrical performance should exhibit similar features, which is why various measures are taken to attract attention. In Peter Brook's version of Mahabharata a child acted as a listener; this was Brook's reaction to the consequences of the non-dramatic form of his *mise en scène* which started as a narrative, a tale of "days long gone". In line with the director's intention, the little listener would ask simplistic questions, thereby, in its naivety, ingratiating with the audience, who entirely succumbed to the magic of the story. Interest in a play can also be subject to extra-theatrical facets, such as the price of tickets. Conventionally, a high price suggests high value of the commodity. Similarly, a good review or comments made by an authority in the field can result in high expectations about the play. All of the above have to be taken into account with respect to performance reception. Our focal point here is the influence of a theatrical situation in itself on captivating viewers' attention.

Semioticians stress the role of convention which makes the audience add meaning to stage events. However, a theatrical situation entails the existence of an inherent mechanism of focusing attention. One of its elements is delineating the area where action takes place. Even initiators of certain happenings put ropes around the space where they are performing. During their experimental tour of Africa Brook's troupe would lay a rug on the ground before performing; in bourgeois theatre the ramp constitutes the main boundary of the theatrical world. These actions are all based on the principle of perception presented in earlier sections, which holds that the density of a confined space is greater – in other words, it is perceived as heavier. In theatre, this principle typically manifests itself by means of stage frame. Invented to enhance illusion, it naturally leads to focusing of attention, as the audience perceive the stage as a space where signs are dense abundant (in line with Łotman's model). Arguably, this is why stage frame still prevails although illusion is no longer a central concept in theatre; recently, it has even grown in status, becoming – albeit in a modified form – one of the main moderators of cognition in Krystian Lupa's performances. In his book, Grzegorz Niziołek points out that "the concept of box stage is renewed and reinforced in Lupa's performances. It presents a compressed view of life, refreshing and

enhancing our cognition at the same time. Lupa uses a »fourth wall«, a frame with fishing line stretched on it, like a net. Thus actors keep the audience at bay, and the audience perceive the play from a different angle, with new experiences as characters, objects and events are seen as if through a transparent pane; Lupa speaks here of »3D shock«" (Niziołek 1995: 108–113). Thus, stage frame plays an active (and significant) part in performance reception.

It seems, therefore, that an event has to be not only unusual but also physically distant to arouse interest. As Raszewski aptly points out, a volcanic eruption can only be admired at a distance; however, if the distance is too great, interest fades. Raszewski's belief that the correct distance to events must be maintained draws on Kozielecki's cognitive human psychology, which has it that any act of ostension must be strong enough to be perceptible, but may not be too great a novelty for the recipient as it will be neglected. The same holds good for theatre. Dyed-in-the-wool convention leads to boredom, excessive avant-garde daunts as entirely incomprehensible. However, one must not forget external factors which influence our attitude. As a theatrical performance is conventionally taken as a meaningful event (this is a view that semiotics holds), a greater degree of tolerance toward any instances of unconventional adornment of theatrical images is required. There are limits to this tolerance, though, and they are context-dependent. For instance, acclaimed artists who can be trusted as to the significance of what they have to say can take the liberty to be more innovative. In turn, when a critic is working on a review of a play, their attitude has to be more open and inquisitive, to justify their point of view.

There is more to ostension, though, than its communicative function, making the recipient take the trouble to interpret stage events. Acts of ostension also shape meaning by selecting only those elements of the *mise en scène* that would help set up a hierarchy of signs necessary to comprehend a performance. Assigning meaning to each stage element runs counter to the idea of the cognitive process. It does not lead to a holistic interpretation of the work of art; moreover, it is not feasible, as selecting elements and assigning meanings is practically inexhaustible. Drama can to a certain extent be guided by specific for it discourse codes, whereby the protagonist or the plot's key elements can be pinpointed. However, if a drama is staged with a view to merely presenting its storyline on stage, then the cast should have a range of theatrical strategies to manipulate information selection that is part of performance reception.

The most foolproof way to achieve this is to establish a code which would arbitrarily draw the audience's attention to relevant elements of the stage image. In antiquity it was the actor's attire that distinguished him from the surrounding. Such codes, though, tend to be too static as compared with the dynamic development of the plot. Therefore in certain historical periods theatre used highly conventional methods of acting whereby fixed gestures and choreography steered the audience's attention. Contemporary theatre, even though it occasionally refers to traditions of the past, dismisses the static code as fossilized, as it prevents any development in the form. The development of stage space does not proceed so radically. Despite the theatrical revolution of the XX century and significant changes to the idea of the stage, viewers still associate theatre primarily with the stage standing apart from the audience and the curtain which marks particular junctures of the play.

The curtain as theatre's main attribute was interestingly analyzed in Małgorzata Sugiera's paper on Jerzy Grzegorzewski's staging of *Dziesięć portretów z czajką w tle* (Chechov based). The curtain first rises at the beginning, showing

> "fuzzy contours of objects, the characters of Nina, Konstanty, Miedwiedenko, but above all Masza clad in a black dress under which she conceals her true feelings. The next scene shows Konstanty, lonely and trapped in time, reflecting the emotional state of all the characters. A gray curtain then unfolds, revealing another one – red and draped. When Masza talks to Dorn and discloses her feelings toward Konstanty, the red curtain is slowly drawn back. The audience cannot see the background, though, as behind the red curtain there is white framed canvas. Nina, naked from the waist up, kneels in front of it. […] She then says to Trigorin: »I spent my entire life at that lake and I know every single islet here«; this sounds as the beginning of the story we all make up, scene by scene, until finally it becomes like life. The story of the girl-bird is eventually completed by Trigorin. […] When he tells the story, Nina slides the canvas off the stage. With the canvas gone, another curtain appears, this time in the form of a white two-winged door in the rear wall of the stage. It is at that door that Irina knocks in despair during Konstanty's suicidal attempt. It is also there that she acts out her main »scene«, trying to prove to Trigorin how helpless he has been since she discovered his secret. The door never opens, not for anybody, although the niche backstage clearly suggests that there must be something on the other side" (Sugiera 1993: 117).

For Sugiera, Grzegorzewski's multiple curtains are metaphorical, in that they "go deeper and deeper into the essence of everyday »theatre« of character, revealing how their double identities work" (*ibidem*: 118). The above-mentioned analysis clearly shows how the subsequent unfolding of curtains draw the audience's attention to relevant facets of actions and utterances linking them to form a meaningful whole (Sugiera 1993: 117).

The opening up of the curtain with a view to focusing attention in a temporal and spatial frame can be found in a variety of theatrical traditions. However, there are few other performance elements that are so closely connected to theatre code. It is therefore hard to call theatre a catalogue of tricks. Thus watching a play is like observing the surrounding reality, but the observer lacks pragmatic context, therefore there is no purpose in his interpretative actions and, consequently, no reactions. A driver who wants to avoid a road accident seeks information about traffic regulations. The audience are normally not at risk; even if actors have some provocation in store for them, such as dousing them or pouring flour on them, they can hardly help it. Why then would one want to involve oneself in the events that are being shown or attempt to comprehend them sitting in a comfortable armchair (which political theatre advocates so often condemn)? By saying merely that it is part of the agreement which we have already discussed that gets the viewer to focus attention we make the recipient take the entire responsibility for the meaning of the performance, which by extension leaves out the issue of the art of acting. However, a good performance can gain even in the eyes of the most hard-headed skeptics, whereas incompetent acting can put off even the most faithful advocates. The art of "persuasion" is based, among others, on the ability to captivate attention, sometimes merely to gather any the audience that come. Street performers know it very well, so they start their work with a selection of rhetorical tricks to attract attention; when a group of bystanders have already congregated they "warm them up" by practicing "spontaneous reactions". Professional non-theatrical troupes act accordingly. Eugenio Barba describes how his group Odin prepare for their

performances by strutting around on stilts with colorful pennants attached to them, blowing whistles and playing drums.

It is not always so that one can resort to such aggressive solutions, though. In drama whistling and getting the audience to applaud or shout is hardly used except in comedy, and even there it is not common. Therefore to focus the audience's attention on the plot the cast have to deploy much subtler techniques. Roberta Carrieri, a member of Odin, brings up this issue presenting a video recording of a workshop where her gestures make the audience focus.

Peter Brook's experiments also demonstrate how attracting attention to stage events forms an intrinsic part of acting. In his accounts of the trip to Africa incomprehension, a result of natives' lack of interest in what the visiting troupe have to show, is a recurring issue. It stemmed not from incompetence at acting, though, but from unfamiliarity with the target culture. For the art of focusing the audience's attention is mostly about striking a viable balance between the efficiency of a message and its appropriacy in a given situational context.

The need to restrain hard-line methods of influencing theatrical audience stems not only from the general principle of drawing the line somewhere, but also from fitting our actions to the framework of rules and regulations that hold in the world on stage. Solutions that are unwarrantable or otherwise depart from the core of the play tend to be regarded as erroneous. A play that is aesthetically based on visual effects should avoid unwarrantable reliance on sharp sounds or means of verbal expression. What then does "unwarrantable" mean in this context? It is normally for the critic to decide. Theoretically speaking, one can only say that any act of ostension should have some rationale within the framework of the rules that govern the world on stage or its presentation.

As the issue is best exemplified by showing an imaginary world against dramatic narration, let us look at acts of ostension and their mutual compatibility in Konrad Swinarski's staging of *Forefathers' Eve*, a fairly traditional version in this respect. One of the director's main concerns is how to account for the presence of spirits that appear during the rites that the local folk perform. As theatre is not endowed with such efficient means of conveying illusion as film is, a viable solution is to do away with the spirits, so only their voices can be heard from a distance, or to assume that theatre is arbitrary *per se*. Contemporary theatre barely tolerates presenting immaterial characters in an illusory way. As far as ostension is concerned, the issue narrows down to how spirits are shown on stage (or, more precisely, how their presence is made known to the audience). Conventional signals, such as the wind howling or a door squeaking, can be dismissed as too naïve for a reputable *mise en scène*; furthermore, they make the performance tediously repetitive. In *Forefathers' Eve* the ghosts appear at short intervals, so Swinarski deploys different techniques each time their presence is signaled. Prior to the appearance of doves that symbolize the ghosts of children, the team look around anxiously in wait for the first spirit. When the spotlight illuminates the doves perched on a ledge, the team look in their direction and point at them. The ghost of the evil master, on the other hand, announces his arrival by a loud knock at the door, thus scaring the team. Finally, Zosia, blown in by the wind, occupies a focal place on the stage – the altar.

Even second-grade directors know that the audience find repetitive images boring. Swinarski achieved excellence in that all of the many ploys used to direct the audi-

ence's attention have been amply justified in the sphere of the play's ideology. The doves are brought to light quite literally (the spotlight), but also by the team's ostensive behavior. They cannot take any actions, nor express their needs; they are like toddlers, dependent on their parents' thoughtfulness (Swinarski made the children's souls dumb). In turn, the ghost of the evil master knows perfectly well what he wants. The problem is that the team fear and hate him at the same time, just as they did when he was alive. A beggar cannot thud on the window or scare people away with fiery flames. But it is in the nature of this spirit to be unsympathetic and vehement, and that is what makes him condemned forever. Zosia also manages to find a place for herself. Mindful of her unfulfilled love, the girl desecrates the altar, pretending to be making love as she delivers her monologue. Paradoxical as it may seem, though, it is not impurity that makes her suffer, but purity. The finest girl in town, Zosia was too proud to lower herself to try bodily pleasures and 'touch the ground' even once. Thus, what the rite master says on her arrival ("Is it indeed Our Lady's vision, or an angel come down") is to be understood as accusation, condemnation of a young woman guilty of making herself superior to other mortals. The fact that Zosia is placed on the altar is a discrepancy between her need to experience the "pleasures of life on Earth" and the sanctity of the place; it serves to illustrate the secret of love, purity and its violation, which some people find it hard to come to terms with.

The art of putting plays on stage is inextricably linked with the skill to combine staging ploys with the logic of the world shown on stage. In daily life we are forced to learn to achieve the goals we set ourselves without excessively stretching social rules; likewise, in theatre the use of ploys enhancing the visual effect or the meaning of a scene is restricted by the regulations of dramatic narration. Similarly the type of representation should be justified if it falls outside current standards. Marta Fik recalls that "before Swinarski's staging, all other versions of *Forefathers' Eve* (in particular Part Two) were merely theatrical »illustrations« of the play with some suspense-creating effects. […] Any other, more »detailed« or »specific« instructions as to how to present the rite, were taken arbitrarily. […] By reconstructing the rite, Swinarski gave it its own clarity and authenticity" (Fik 1999: 196–197) Why then did the audience not frown at having to »go against their conventions«, so to speak? After all, Swinarski's *mise en scène* was hailed as a major achievement in the history of the Polish stage. The reason is primarily the coherent and consistently realized principle of rooting characters' actions and experiences in their sensual and bodily perceptions as well as significant matters of the real world. In *Great Improvisation* Konrad falls down »defeated by his body's weakness, as if by epilepsy«. Lucifer, who acts as master of ceremony at the ball (starring Jerzy Stuhr in both roles), gets involved in an actual political dispute between Polish patriots and the senator's court – thus his actions acquire an equally realistic dimension. Thus all the actions gravitate toward real world issues. Fik is right in stressing that "*Forefathers' Eve* have never been interpretable in a mystic fashion" (*ibidem*: 196).

This is actually what Swinarski used to the benefit of his play, not necessarily in the sense that he speaks of things that the audience feel close to. Mysticism and transcendence need not be dehumanized, but as spirits assumed human form, Swinarski managed to create unforgettable characters, free from the stereotypical metaphysics of the romantic hero or the stigma of the naive, local-festival-style presentation of the ghost. It is none other than the ghosts arriving at the scene of the rite at the beginning of the

play who attract the audience's attention to real life issues. Doves are not too far from the conventional way of showing spirits, but the use of live birds goes somewhat beyond the conventional theatre arbitrariness. The dummy that acts as the evil master is in the course of the play replaced by an actor, who can show the ghoul's suffering on stage. Finally, there is Zosia, with her faltering voice, trembling, hysterical, eager to experience real love. These are no longer one-dimensional characters like the ones traditional Polish 'spirit shows' used to portray. Neither are they merely voices from behind the stage. They are genuine ghosts, as shown by Mickiewicz in his work. Their words are folk wisdom rather than religious preaching, in line with eastern, beliefs, referring more often to natural laws than to the metaphysics and mysticism of the western world. Thus the presence of "living spirits" in Swinarski's staging is entirely justifiable; thanks to it, the characters have access to more means of artistic expression. As a consequence, the *mise en scène* is free from the monotony of typical markers of the supernatural, and the director can take the liberty to utilize staging ploys based on the major issues of human existence that the spirits portray.

The requirement to fit ostensive behavior within the framework of the rule-governed world of the play and its conventionalized stage representation becomes part of the most popular form of western world drama, where the central issue is the plot made up of fictional events which the actors show on stage. The events give rise to interpretative conclusions that the audience can draw, form a point of reference to artistic activity, and help attach greater or lesser importance to a given play. Zbigniew Raszewski very aptly points out that "the only reason why a portraying world should exist is to produce the portrayed one" (Raszewski *op.cit.*: 124). However, in our culture there are also other forms of theatrical expression that give other objectives priority over representation; these objectives include exploring the phenomenon of performing or "pondering over the essence of performance and the process of creating additional meaning" (Pavis 1998: 180). In turn, in political theatre actions are prompted not so much by the telling of a story, but the ability to change social awareness in a specific way. Thus the pragmatic rationale behind political theatre delineates staging techniques that accord with the rules of rhetoric and the reality behind the scenes to a much greater degree than theatre of fiction. In Meyerhold's ground-breaking *Jutrznie* upon entering the theatre the audience were greeted by agitating slogans painted on the walls; moreover, the show included reports on actual events of the Russian revolution. It has been standard practice in theatre through centuries to draw on elements of reality when creating a world of fiction, but Meyerhold in fact strove for the opposite, for fact to annex fiction. His audience were so accustomed to it that when "Red Army militants came on stage on one occasion and the performance turned into a genuine rally" (Braun 1984: 224), it came to them as no surprise whatsoever. Meyerhold's plays were part of the reality of the revolution, not a separate world of fiction insulated against audience intervention, which would merely show reality on stage.

The rhetoric of political theatre makes directors specify a suitable pragmatic context. In theatre of illusion context becomes a marginal issue or varies depending on critical interpretation (which can make a performance even more valuable). In political theatre, if performances were open to multiple interpretations, it would run counter to the very rationale behind this form of art. Let us go back to the example of the drunkard poised on a platform in the middle of town. As we have already learned, the message this act attempts to convey will be subject to many interpretations, depending on

who passers-by think may have instigated the happening. The Salvation Army's intention to debase the detrimental effect of abusive drinking will go to waste if most of the passers-by decide that the drunk has been put on the platform by a revolutionary movement; in this case, rather than a symbol of dissipation the drunk will become a picture showing the consequences of the government's ineffective social policy. Given that, the instigators have to suggest to the audience who is behind the happening. It does not seem to be a difficult task. The drunkard might even be wearing a t-shirt with the appropriate logo, but audiences do not always accept going against the rules shown in theatre of illusion, or making the intended objective overtly explicit, or making the author of a didactic-political utterance known to the general public. We do not like being preached. That is why the Salvation Army ought to opt for more subtle techniques, thus showing that they are acquainted with the art of influencing personal opinions. Arguably, a passer-by should not identify the instigators offhand, as he can grasp the message before he has seen the drunk "perform", since the Salvation Army promotes universally recognizable values. Then the actor who plays the drunk should also exhibit some talent, as he will have to try to highlight the desired facets of drunkenness. The character should ideally arouse sympathy or disgust, but not at the mishap that he was unfortunate to experience, but the one he himself asked for. It is certainly a tall order, but at the same time part of the art of acting – not so much to be the spitting image of the person one appears as, but to underline certain aspects of their character. If the actor imitates a drunk he is more likely to provoke laughter than reflection.

A theatrical performer ought to be able to influence the selection of incoming information among viewers, as it constitutes a powerful tool for manipulating imagination. Otherwise actors are guided by pure luck, which makes them amateur. Most actors and directors follow their intuition and experience plus a flair for theatre. However, there are after all rules subject to rational explanation.

## Ostraniene

On the basis of what has been said so far, it is fairly easy to infer that ostension is most often equated with a dramatic procedure known as *ostraniene*[*]. This Russian term often appears in works by both theatre scholars and practitioners. Its source is the Russian formalist school, which had a major influence on the development of literary criticism, and also on the discussions on the art of the twentieth century. One can assume that the success of the term was also partly due to the high profile of early XX century Russian theatre, which coincided with the beginnings of the formalist school. Stanislawski and Meyerhold are arguably the most quoted authors in literature treating of dramatic art. Also some contemporary playwrights and directors employ directly the formalists' ideas. To take an example, Eugenio Barba – a key originator of the second theatrical revolution and the creator of "the third theater" – refers in his book to Viktor Shklovsky, a representative of the Russian formalist school. Shklovski spoke of *ostraniene* "as

[*] The most felicitous English translation of the term seems to be that suggested by Benjamin Sher, who in the translator's introduction to Shklovsky's "theory of Prose" uses the term "enstrangement".

a process or act that endows an object or image with "strangeness" by "removing" it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expressions based on such perceptions" (Shklovsky 1991: XIX).

However inspirational they may be, the formalists' ideas cannot be applied directly in the theatrical reality. Describing the development of the historical-literary process subjected to predominantly the inherent laws of automatization and disautomatization, they focus on style and composition. Disautomatization consists in most of all transgressing the norms of style and the conventionalized arrangement of elements of the reality shown. In contemporary theatre it is difficult to speak of a system of stylistic norms that would be recognizable enough to the audience to result in serious interpretative consequences in case they were broken. In turn, the conventionalization of the rules of the reality shown is connected with the composition of the plot rather than the rules for presenting dramatic heroes and objects.

There are of course some common theatrical conventions, which were discussed earlier in this work. When actors overstep the boundaries of the stage, invading the area reserved for the viewers, the audience normally treat such actions as relevant and try to interpret them. The same is true when a play is performed in the foyer – as was the case with the Forefathers' Eve rites in Swinarski's performance – or when the audience has been made to sit in the wings (as in Andrzej Wajda's *Hamlet IV*), and is thus able to watch the play "from the inside". It is however decidedly more often that the understanding of a dramatic event is based on the knowledge acquired through experience that is not linked with the knowledge of theatrical codes. It is in such a context that Burns (1972: 315) has made a distinction between two types of conventions:

- rhetorical: "The means by which the audience is persuaded to accept characters and situations whose validity is ephemeral and bound to the theatre" (*ibidem*: 31),
- authenticating: the conventions providing with relevance the rhetorical effort of dramatic art, owing to their origin in everyday, extratheatrical experience of the recipient.

The latter group of conventions are those which "prevail for the interaction of the actors as characters in the play. [They are t]he »model« social conventions in use at a specific time and in a specific place or milieu. The modes of speech, demeanor and action that are explicit in the play have to carry conviction and imply a connection with the world of human action of which the theatre is only a part. These conventions suggest a total and external code of values and norms of conduct from which the speech and action of the play are drawn" (*ibidem*: 32). It should be added that a model of extratheatrical behavior has to allow for deviations from the norm as equally important instances of behavior. Walaszek (1991: 207) in her description of the entrance made by another character of Swinarski's *Forefathers' Eve*, Senator, stresses his hauteur and loftiness and directs the reader's attention to the behavior of Senator's henchmen, who enter the stage walking backwards (because they have to face him) and then sit down gingerly on the edge of the chairs instead of assuming a more comfortable position. Such unusual behavior of the characters is therefore explained by the henchmen's awe-inspired attitude to Senator.

Although examples of such singular behavior are not uncommon in everyday life, for other forms of dramatic activity a simple analogy with the gestures and behavior characteristic of normal human activity sometimes does not suffice. In one of the first

scenes of Grzegorzewski's *The Slow Darkening of Paintings*, the main hero, Consul, approaches the proscenium calling out the nonsense words, "Coriolanus, he is dead! Nothing! Nothing!" and then makes a series of movements, which could not be explained even in the context of the most extravagant of behaviors. The bizarre ballet, full of superhuman struggle against gravitation and the character's own body cannot be put down to intoxication. His gestures and poses are too artificial to pass for the random and unsynchronized movements of a drunk person. In the real world Consul's actions could be at best interpreted as indicative of a mental illness or as a pointless provocation. The nature of theatre, however, permits some exaggeration, which requires an interpretative effort leading to an explanation going beyond the singularity and abnormality of a given scene. For Ewa Bulhak, Marek Walczewski's acting in Grzegorzewski's play is a hyperbole allowing the recipient to see how a body living its own life assumes inhuman forms (Bułhak 1985: 74). The use of hyperbole can be justified by, inter alia, the fact that an actor staggering in the "usual" way would probably not convince the recipient to ascribe supernatural features to Consul, whose story is not a psychological drama but a tragic parable of human fate. Also Sugiera (1995: 161) sees *The Slow Darkening of Paintings* as a play full of pathos, though in her interpretation Consul's torment turns out to be a purposeless illusion and delusory tragedy that nobody needs. Committed to imaginary tragedies and resolute in his uncommunicativeness, the main hero becomes grotesque, thus revealing the falseness of his role. Both these interpretations go beyond the set of conclusions that can be drawn through analogy with people's unusual behavior that we witness in everyday life. It is so because the amplification of the character's stubborn uncommunicativeness or lack of control over his own body goes beyond the boundaries of authenticating conventions, preferring the rhetorical figure of hyperbole instead.

One should not limit authenticating conventions – also in the shape of their negation, which consists in a meaning-inducing modification – to models of social behavior acquired through everyday experience. The recipients come to the theatre equipped with much more ideas about the world, which are the result of the appreciation of art and knowledge gained from books and other sources of information. The difference between authenticating and rhetorical conventions does not lie in the nature of the source where they comes from, but in their function. Authenticating conventions are part of the reality, whose authenticity or rather probability is not questioned by the audience. Since however we do not have access to many spheres of life, our convictions are shaped on the basis of messages of often fictitious or artistic nature. Also art itself is largely a territory described by people in terms of truth and probability. An unwavering Hamlet will always seem as unreal as the departure to Moscow of the three sisters from Chekov's drama. Thanks to such a way of thinking it becomes possible to apply dramatic devices which, by modifying the motives and artistic images of common consciousness, lead to the effect of ostraniene. In Tadeusz Kantor's *May Artists Perish* there was a barricade on the stage resembling that from Delacroix's painting. It was not Liberty, however, that was leading the group of revolutionaries, but Cabaret Hooker. The audience's expectations, derived from the knowledge of painting, were undermined and called for an explanation of the unexpected situation.

The explanation of an unexpected situation on the stage does not always have to consist in ascribing it a meaning within the rules of the reality shown. One must not forget that Burns distinguishes between two coexisting types of conventions; the inter-

pretation of a play is also affected by rhetorical conventions, which set the rules for creating the reality shown in both the common dimension (some general theatrical and dramatic codes) and individually (idiolectally). Entering the stage backwards does not always define the character or his/her attitude towards others. During a rehearsal before Grzegorzewski's *The Screens*, the director asked one of the actresses to appear on the stage walking backwards (*ibidem*: 69) and did so not to accentuate a meaning associated with the mode of walking, but in order to make it easier for her to act out a part of her role: Grzegorzewski's intention was to protect the actress from resorting to conventional ways of manifesting despair. It remains obvious that the audience could treat the manner of entering the stage as meaningful – that is however exactly where the role of rhetorical codes as an idiolect defining the rules of the director's artistic transfer manifests itself. Multiple contact with Grzegorzewski's stage productions makes it clear that actors' movement in his performances should be treated more functionally than in mimetic theatre. The rhetorical code works because it suspends the conclusions imposing themselves on the basis of some of the authenticating codes. What seemed to be *ostraniene*, in connection with the idea of the world contained in our consciousness, becomes a rule for creating a fictitious reality or performing persuasive acts. The theatergoer should learn how to recognize those rules, or otherwise he/she will end up ascribing a special meaning to even simple rules of the presentation modes characteristic of particular theatrical conventions. For example, the rules telling the actors to face the audience when speaking cannot be treated as an important feature of the hero's behavior.

## Repetitiveness and memory

New styles or conventions grow primarily out of repeated practice; consequently, techniques that used to be considered shocking lose their ability to create cognitive distance. As a result, the recipient's interpretative actions are substituted for by automatically associating certain events and actions with unequivocal meaning. In time, the audience get used to characters in Grzegorzewski's plays entering the stage backwards and see nothing particularly significant in the way they move. On the other hand, repetition can lead to reverse effects highlighting an element, thereby becoming an act of ostension. To comprehend what seems to be a discrepancy between the two effects of repetition one must bear in mind that no action or image *per se* constitute an act of enstrangement, but manifest themselves contextually. A character's action is regarded as extraordinary when put in the context of our understanding of what is typical in a given situation. By repeated exposure to an action the audience can get used to its peculiarity. On the other hand, the frequency of repetition itself may strike one as peculiar. Thus enstrangement can refer to various aspects of our mental representation, which should be brought to light in the analysis of an act of cognition.

In order to thoroughly characterize the dimensions of mental representation we would have to provide the readers with an exhaustive report on the findings of Langacker, Lakoff and other cognitivists that deal with cognitive structures. An overview of some is made elsewhere in the thesis, others have been left out as less relevant to the

theory of theatre (at least when we take into account the current state of cognitive studies on the reception of a theatrical performance). Let us therefore limit ourselves to treating enstrangement as a heuristic phenomenon and giving a few examples to help understand repetition in the context of enstrangement.

To start with, enstrangement in theatre more often than not refers to what Goffman terms wrongfully assumed personal façade (Goffman 1981). This means either an action that is in contrast to our character, or a character placed in the wrong context, or finally a character that lacks a significant attribute. The first case is best exemplified by how European directors react to Japanese performances, where female characters are played by male actors. It is particularly interesting to analyze the barely noticeable difference which is due to the motor differences between the two sexes and which makes the men appear slightly odd despite the actors being perfectly competent at what they do. Sometimes a character representing the world of fiction is put in the wrong context. King Richard the Third in Witkiewicz's *Nowe Wyzwolenie* is in sharp contrast to the surrounding, where he is placed, to quote from Konstanty Puzyna, "instead of the helpless Konrad from *Forefathers' Eve*, whereas right beside him, on a sofa, there is a group of characters chatting over a cuppa. There are no masks, but plain murderers brandishing daggers, and in lieu of Erinys six thugs barge in" (Puzyna 1985: 10). The grotesque nightmare is therefore a result of the striking incongruity of characters, objects and events.

Finally, a most spectacular example of a character lacking attributes. Richard II wears no regalia when he is about to abdicate. Noblemen follow him and carry his symbols of power, but as he has no royal coat he is now actually powerless. After the ceremony his crown, too, is snatched away from him. Richard looks into the mirror and throws it to the ground. This gesture runs counter to the previous one. A king wearing no royal attire and no crown should change his identity, as he is no king any longer. But the mirror reflects Richard's old face (Kott 1991: 16, 55). His image of kingship (and ours, in a sense) is ruined.

When the concept of enstrangement is placed within the framework of Goffman's theory, it turns out that the concept is well exemplified by the incongruity between the particular elements of personal façade. A character looking like a woman but moving a little like a man, a king among a company at tea, or rid of the insignia of his power. In real life situations such inconsistencies are merely instances of violating a norm, but in theatre their significance should not be questioned.

Although the examples discussed show a typical way of understanding the nature of *ostraniene*, this rule functions also in the case of frequently repeating the same element of the performance. The technique of repetition works only when it seems unusually recurrent, thus questioning the statistically justified frequency of the repetitions. Walking the stage, the actor makes thousands of the same steps and yet nobody considers that to be a meaningful repetition. On the other hand, the appearance of a dead lapwing three times in Chekov's drama forms the basis for its numerous interpretations. Still another issue is that of repetition as a contribution to the preparation of the audience for a shocking scene or action. We get accustomed to Macbeth's murders as the plot unfolds and it is the murder of the king that seems to be the one to disturb the audience the most. In Scene 6 of the first act there is an example of tragic irony, the only one in the play. "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air Nimbly and sweetly rec-

ommends itself Unto our gentle senses" (Shakespeare 1999: 39), says Duncan after Macbeth's arrival at the castle, while the hosts have already decided on a murder.

The interrelations between repetition and ostraniene are an important mechanism of a theatrical performance. One of the most telling examples is provided in Pleśniarowicz's (1994: 45) analysis of Kantor's *The Dead Class*. The first scene of the performance shows pupils sitting at four old-fashioned desks. They are not, however, "schoolboys preserved in eternal memory but real or made-up old people, who sometimes exchange the bookbags they wear on their backs for mannequins of their own childhood. Their faces are pale as corpses, their hair threaded with white, and some of them are wearing old-fashioned bowler hats. The school uniforms of the child-mannequins that accompany the dead pupils contrast with the cheap "funeral suits" of the pupils themselves, which are less appropriate for the classroom than for a mass burial" (1994: 75, transl. by W. Brand). The whole picture is in stark contrast with the common perception of a classroom, calling for explanations. According to Pleśniarowicz, Kantor's stage design proves the impossibility of reviving childhood memories. "A photographic plate developed in the memory can only be brought to life in the Theater of Death" – hence the old men's funeral clothes and mannequins, which "rather than »playing« the dead, […] »replace« them in a special way and participate in the metonymic relation of shifts from dead to doll to actor as intermediaries" (1994: 76, transl. by W. Brand). In Kantor's performance there are much more elements going against the conventional idea of the world. With time they become familiar and ordinary, owing to frequent repetition of the same images and actions. Pleśniarowicz provides an apt and precise ordering classification of the play, dividing it into six recurrent "photographs" and six sequences.

Photographs:

K1 – The photograph of the dead class.

K2 – The parade of the pupils around the benches.

K3 – The successive lessons centered around thematic slogans.

K4 – The school transformed into a *heder*.

K5 – The Grand Toasts.

K6 – The auditory photograph.

Sequences:

S1 – The games played by the Cleaning Woman.

S2 – The family machine along with the mechanical cradle.

S3 – The Secret Official Executioner in the WC.

S4 – Collusions with the void.

S5 – The simultaneous orgy and the colonial robinsonial.

S6 – The woman with a mechanical cradle beside the cradle-coffin and a pile of rubbish sings a Jewish lullaby.

Pleśniarowicz then goes on to distinguish significant arrangements of photographs and sequences which show the impossibility of reviving past events. For considerations about the function of repetition particularly important is the very fact of the establishment of clear-cut performance units. Thanks to the successive repetitions, what seemed difficult to explain turns into recognizable units, which make up the language of *The Dead Class*. However, if the language is to impact upon the recipient, it cannot remain static. One of the basic factors starting and stimulating the recipient's cognitive activity is the interference with the recipient's idea of the world existing in his/her mind. That

is why Kantor introduces some variability to the successive repetitions of particular photographs: "[e]arlier images like that of the Grand Toast can be filed in, but in the form of posing for a Historical Daguerreotype. There can be a return to the benches for the next "lesson", but with white handkerchiefs tied across the pupils' eyes (The Ceremonial Funeral). Or again, in reverse, certain elements may be subtracted from a re-evoked situation: the run around the benches but without the mannequins of childhood, the voices alone from the Historical Hallucinations, without the actors. Also transformations appear frequently: dolls in the benches instead of the actors, the *heder* replaced by the Jewish lullaby" (*ibidem*: 69, transl. by W. Brand). The creative capabilities of the language of theatre are thus defined by the process of setting, and at the same time questioning, a code, which I why a particular artist's idiolect or a given artistic trend appeal to the audience.

The variability of the repetitions finishes the cycle of the performative procedures connected with the process of disturbing the recipients' idea of the world, as well as closes the stage of their assimilation. With time, the intriguingly odd scenes of *The Dead Class* get assimilated and begin to make up the image of the world shown on the stage. At the same time, particular meaningful units create the possibility of their further modification, and thus of more instances of ostraniene, which appear as elements of the afore-mentioned variability. Pleśniarowicz's analysis documents one of Lotman's basic postulates: every performance should work out its own code. A key prerequisite for this process are acts of ostension embedded in repetition. In *The Dead Class* they bring about a certain aesthetic aura, which makes it possible to order the performance according to Pleśniarowicz's semantic rhythms: reviving – dying, focusing – dispersing, validating – canceling etc.

Not every theatrical performance provides examples of such explicit semantic rhythms, emerging thanks to easily discernible similarities between particular scenes. In every performance nevertheless the categories of rhythm and similarity constitute a basic aspect of ostension acts. The semantic meaning of rhythm is most often analyzed in connection with the text of the play. So understood, the rhythm decides about the arrangement of dialogues, configuration of conflicts and the semantic hierarchy of scenes, as well as controls the tempo of replies – it thus manages the dramatic appeal of the performance (see Pavis 1998: 442). By highlighting the turning points, the rhythm is also important for the composition of the play. As for the semantic function of the scene hierarchy defined by rhythm, so far no definitive conclusions have been drawn by theatre scholars, who limit themselves to most of all working out hierarchies of the rhythms in a particular play and describing their role in the creation of the relationships between different systems of stage signs (*ibidem*: 440–444).

Still, in the context of the semantic function of ostension discussed here, the rhythm of a theatrical performance constitutes a key meaning-inducing factor. Particular semantic elements get the audience's attention, whereas their appropriate arrangement (hierarchy) can decide about the suspense and tension of the turning points.

The connection of rhythmic arrangements with the interpretation intended by the director can be observed in Niziolek's (*op.cit.*: 72) analysis of Gombrowicz's *Wedding* as staged by Krystian Lupa. Niziolek points out that, introducing a new arrangement of semantic elements, the composition of the performance makes it possible to highlight some motifs and disregard others. According to Niziolek, "Lupa in some way destroys the composition of *The Wedding*. He is not interested in the dramatic functioning of

sleep or the mechanism of associations in dreams, but in the intense experience of one's own self that borders on hallucination" (*ibidem*). One of the culminations of such an experience was the moment when the "great sorcerer" appeared through Henryk, the main hero's actions. "He is circling Wladzio, who is imprisoned in the center of a circle drawn on the floor. The dialogue has been written into the rhythm of the repeated »laps« and Henryk's intensifying trance" (*ibidem*). The great sorcerer himself is not among the *dramatis personae* of the play, but the intensification of the rhythm, which is at the core of the third act, invalidates the other meanings of the drama, focusing the recipient's attention on the issue of experiencing one's own self, an issue of interest to the director. Rhythm as the creator of emotional tension thus does not have to constitute negation of the intellect in theater. Similarly, it does not have to be based on the rhythms of "extradramatic systems". The scene described is about a ritual activity of characters that involves movement and speech, i.e. elements characteristic predominantly of the theater rather than other art forms.

The second of the categories allowing one to notice the repetitiveness of scenes, that of similarity, in principle requires an analysis only at the conceptual level. A precise definition of the nature of similarity, i.e. the explanation of how it is different from the category of analogy, needs to be based on a characterization of relevant features of the process of conceptualization. In the context of ostension, memory remains the only element of the cognitive process that gets evoked by comparing particular moments of a performance. Any comparison of remote fragments of the plot or references to earlier scenes are only possible on the condition that an earlier situation or image that are being referred to have stuck in the recipient's memory powerfully enough to be evoked. Let us examine the similarity between two scenes from Swiarski's *Forefathers' Eve*, which are pointed out by Walaszek, who justifies the comparison of the Senator's dream with Konrad's prophetic vision by noting an analogy between the two characters' movements. Pursuing imaginary fame and authority, both the Senator and Konrad negotiate the same inclined plane of the platform to raeach its central point, where, disillusioned, they fall to the ground. However, was Konrad's and Senator's route conspicuous for other recipients? Conversations with students who watched the performance on tape show that, although they did not notice the analogy, they accepted it as well-founded after reading Walaszek's interpretation. The students' reaction suggests a basic difference between accepting the meanings potentially present in a performance and actually noticing them during the performance, which decides about the authentic experience of an encounter with the play, i.e. an aesthetic experience. In the same vein, it has to be emphasised that although as a result of persuasion the audience may begin to notice an analogy between two scenes, it need not be convincing. This is so because the performance itself may not provide strong enough signals that would make it possible to link both fragments. That is one of the reasons why an intriguing interpretation presented by theater critics does not always contribute to the success of a performance. The value of watching the events presented on stage is based on emotional and intellectual impressions, which stem from the perception of those events. That is why the director of a play has to make sure that the meaningful juxtapositions of chosen fragments are the result of predominantly performative actions. The similarity itself of remote scenes is most often not enough. The director thus can choose some additional solutions. Firstly, he/she can reinforce the effect of the first of the scenes so that it gets remembered by the audience. Conversely, an obvious reference to the ear-

lier scene is an option. The theater, which normally does not have a narrator bringing back the previous events in the commentary, uses a distinctive sign selected from among all the elements of the scene presented, or, alternatively, a recurring musical theme. The use of a conventionalized symbol, which only constitutes part of an event shown earlier, is often more effective in evoking an earlier, similar moment of the play than the aggregate similarity of both moments. Another advantage of only using a fragment of the whole for building up similarity is the possibility of introducing variability to the recurring images, as noted in Plesniarowicz's analysis of *The Dead Class*. Despite the fact the successive "pupil parades", each time shown differently, are easily classifiable under the same manner of activity, Kantor complements them with the recurring theme of the waltz *François*. In doing so, he assures the audience that the parades and sudden chases of the old men are still the same ritual of "the funeral of dead childhood" (Plesniarowicz *op.cit.*). A theater director thus has to allow for the recipient's cognitive capabilities, his/her memory capacity in this case. As for the solution the director chooses to achieve the intended effect has to go wel with the logic of the performance, since it would be difficult to determine all similarities and analogies by means of only a sentimental waltz.

The special status of *ostraniene* as a type of ostension is linked to directors' conviction that it constitutes a key meaning-inducing activity. According to Ida Kurcz (1995: 135), the development of cognitive abilities results from the unbalancing of the cognitive system. Still more interesting in the context of some practitioners' considerations about activating the audience seem to be Kozielecki's (1980: 237–238) remarks, who claims that

> "the driving forces behind an activity lie in internal and external information that is properly structured. Discrepancies and oppositions between pieces of information become the main source of motivation. […] An interesting issue are the relationships between the magnitude of discrepancies and the extent of motivation. According to a common understanding of the world, the bigger the difference between aspirations and the actual situation, the greater the determination to achieve new gains. […] And yet that is not so. In psychology one rarely finds such simple correlations. […] Humans are equipped with a certain tolerance towards the discrepancy between aspirations and achievements. When this discrepancy is small, no action is taken. […] Interestingly, a very big discrepancy between the standard and the actual situation does not bring about stron motivation" (*ibidem*).

A director using ostraniene should thus do so in line with the rule of the golden mean, adjusting the degree of "strangeness" to the situation. Worth mentioning here is Brecht's concept of the *verfremdungseffekt*, or "alienation effect", which should make it possible to recognize an object on stage, at the same time giving it an appearance of strangeness. In such a way political theater forces the recipient to assume a critical approach, i.e. some intellectual activity aimed at explaining the strangeness of the events shown. And that in turn should lead to recognizing the rules governing social life. The object, as Brecht stresses, should nevertheless be recognizable because otherwise the recipient will give up any attempts at trying to interpret the events, dismissing the director and actors' effort.

Every kind of ostension consists in highlighting, more or less intensely, an object, fragment of space or simply a direction. There is thus always a kind of ostraniene involved, consisting in giving a particular element or direction a different status to that of the other elements being perceived. However, it seems that the concept of ostraniene should be reserved only for describing those cognitive processes, which are based on the difference between the image of reality held in the recipient's mind and the new information coming from the stage. For there is a set of ostensive activities that are connected with predominantly acts of perception determined by human nature and with trained conventions of reception, and only at a later stage with the alienation effect.

According to assumptions adopted by psychologists, motivation for human activity comes from the lack of balance experienced by the body, which state leads to activities aimed at redressing the balance. In referring this position to the process of perception, one needs to assume that every instance of imbalance appearing in the perceived image, brings about the recipient's mental activity. The basic mechanisms underlying that process are described in Arnheim's work on *Art and Visual Perception* (1974). At this point it does not seem unreasonable to make some references to Arnheim's remarks, which tell us about the ways in which we perceive most of spatial compositions. Arnheims begins his considerations with an example of a black disk placed on a white square. He points out that we do not have to make any measurements but can see at a glance that the disk lies off-center. He then introduces an example in which a disk placed very close to one of the boundaries of the same square appears to be drawn toward the contour. This illusion has its explanation in psychological forces of perception, which are based on an interplay of directed tensions. To quote Arnheim, "these tensions are not something the observer adds, for reasons of his own, to static images. Rather, they are as inherent in any percept as size, shape, location, or color" (*ibidem*). In consequence, they constitute a universal rule of perception. To cut a long story short, let us just point out that some spatial compositions are perceived as unbalanced, thus creating certain directed tensions. These tensions in turn control the spectator's attention, directing it to a particular aspect of the performance. Apart from the action of directed tensions in a percept, one can also speak of the perception of weight there, not only in the form of an obvious impression that ascribes greater weight to bigger objects, but also as a consequence of colour and perspective. As it turns out, spatial depth is a factor influencing the emergence of the impression of heaviness ascribed to particular objects. As Arnheim puts it, "the greater the depth an area of the visual field reaches, the greater the weight it carries" (*ibidem*: 24). A similar rule applies to the choice of colours: the lighter the colour, the heavier it appears. Finally, Ether Puffer speaks of *intrinsic interest*: "An area of a painting may hold the observer's attention either because of the subject matter-for example, the spot around the Christ child in an Adoration – or because of its formal complexity, intricacy, or other pecularity" (*ibidem*: 24) Puffer's comment makes evident the relationship between meaning and the nature of perception. What appears to be heavier, will be more likely interpreted as the semantic centre of a picture than its other elements. In this context the common metaphor of an ideas or opinions "carrying weight", i.e. importance, influence etc. is not accidental. Nevertheless, it needs to be made clear that the choice of important ele-

ments is the result of mutual influence, and sometimes of clash between the rules of perception and the recipient's expectations. Sometimes "the very tininess of an objects may exert a fascination that compensates the slight weight it would otherwise have" (*ibidem*: 24).

In his analysis, Arnheim makes some references to theater as well. Arguing that the impression of weight is achieved by highlighting, he quotes actors with leading roles, who often insist that their colleagues should stay within considerable distance from them during important scenes. A similar function is played by highlighting some region of the stage by circumscribing it, i.e. providing with a contour. It is the case that a shape given a contour is normally perceived as more substantial and dense than its surroundings, which seem to act as an empty, diffuse background. Every time then that a character gets somehow separated from the rest, the weight of his/her actions increases in the audience's eyes.

Another significant issue connected with the perception of theatrical space is the distinction between left and right. This distinction constitutes a proclivity stemming from our everyday life, based on the asymmetry of using our arms and the habit of reading from left to right (at least in some cultures). Despite that, some perceptual automatism is created, whereby objects situated on the right-hand side seem to be heavier. In the theater, on the other hand, the recipients tend to identify with the character entering the stage from the left (*ibidem*), a claim difficult to confirm without experimental research. What remains certain is the audience's tendency to ascribe a natural directional hierarchy, from left to right. That is why politicians' faces are put on advertising posters in the right profile, which is to ensure the impression of looking into the future. Similarly, when describing an inclining stage, we tend to say that it ascends from left to right rather than descending from right to left.

The concepts of weight, density or direction are in nonspecialist discussions about performances most often replaced by the term center of the action, which constitutes a conceptual generalization of the perception attributes mentioned. The specification of such a center is the not limited to perception processes, but also depends on conceptual activity as well as some habits stemming from the knowledge of social and theatrical conventions. The central point of the world shown on stage can thus be positioned at the intersection of two ways, as for instance in Swinarski's *Forefathers' Eve*, where the centre of the space was defined by intersecting podiums. Nevertheless, theater uses more often the social conventions which highlight some characters because of their social status or focus the recipients' attention on such objects and places as e.g. a throne, pulpit or altar. Arguably the most frequent instrument used by directors is the arrangement of the characters. A hero surrounded by other *dramatis personae* focuses the audience's attention, as does an object circumscribed by a line. In many such cases an additional factor highlighting the person enclosed by the circle is the surrounding characters' gaze, directed towards him/her. The tendency to follow somebody else's gaze is not a rule of perception; it is learned. Still it functions very effectively indeed, which is noticeable in plays for children, where the audience often look around the theater, yielding to the illusion created by the actors, who notice exceptionally interesting characters and events all around. For an adult audience, which is more often focused on the actors' performance itself, the characters' gazes are an effective marker of important elements of the play. Pavis (1995), in his analysis of Brook's *Marat/Sade* draws our attention to the scene, in which Sade hands over a dagger to Charlotte that

will be used to kill Marat. The dagger has been described by Pavis as a *punctum*, i.e. "in Barthes' sense of the term […] the main detail in a photograph, a detail which "touches" us and imposes its meaning […]. The *punctum* is foregrounded via a system of focused gazes, and also, by the convergence of Sade and Corday's gaze" (Pavis 1995: 220, transl. by Ch. Shantz).

It seems that despite the great influence of stage arrangement on the reception process, the actors' dramatic performance remains a fundamental factor controlling the audience's reaction. The arrangement of characters and contrasts between different groups can all be analysed by means of the methods described by Arnheim in connection with image composition. In the case of theater some additional factors appear, namely sound and movement. Within a static arrangement of elements the recipient's attention gets focused on the elements in motion. That is why some acting techniques consist in making a movement before saying the lines. As for sound, it is a key and extremely effective factor activating the recipient's attention, but rather within a temporal arrangement of events. While visual perception to a great extent depends on the recipient, sounds are mostly perceived involuntarily. It is so because we are unable to recognize the exact place on stage from which the sounds reach us – hence the special role of actors, who, by joining in speech the effects of movement and sound, attract the audience's attention with their every line.

Summing up these considerations, it needs to be emphasised that an analysis of how the audience's attention can be controlled is not easy because of the competing rules of perception. A basic way of distinguishing important elements of a performance remains the comparison of the force of particular signals. Then again, how can we compare the force of sound with the consequences of stage arrangement for reception? Will a region circumscribed with a line seem heavier than its surrounding space? Answers to such questions can only be found through psychological experiments on perception; to a theater scholar they are only an element of an analysis that will not be complete if we do not allow for processes of conteptualization and relevanvce. The human system of distinguishing elements of spatial reality is subordinate to the human mind's tendency to search for significant information and to a mechanism of interpretation that is to lead to a better understanding of the events perceived.

When analysing the assumptions behind a performance we are watching, it is necessary to also distinguish between the ostensive and semantic functions of a dramatic technique or instrument. To explain the implications of such a distinction for the interpretation of a performance, let us examine the function of light. It can introduce a certain atmosphere to the audience or define the character of the person in the spotlight, thus having a primarily semantic function. This happens in the most platitudinous of systems, where blue stands for heveanly provenance of the hero, and red brings associations with infernal powers. And although, in line with the assumption adopted in this dissertation, every act of ostension carries a potential meaning, it does not necessarily lie with the activity itself conducted to attract the recipient's attention. A spotlight highlights the character, concurrently signalling the director's communicative intention, though the colour of the light, its intensity and movement often do not play an important part in the interpretation of the scene.

It is from past experience of everyday situations that we learn to associate the source of ostension with the object that carries basic meaning. For example, hearing a car horn we try to steer clear of the vehicle whose horn is heard. In theatre, on the

other hand, the element underlying ostension does not constitute the central component of the plot in itself. Oftentimes it even stands alone against the meaning-shaping element (unlike in the example of the light earlier). In Swinarski's staging of *Forefathers' Eve* the actress appearing as Sowa mimes her hatred for the Ghost of the Evil Master. As Walaszek puts it, "she gobbles barley, stuffs her mouth with it, almost choking on it – all that before the eyes of the Ghost, who has come to beg for food" (Walaszek 1991: 192). Although the acting is conspicuous, the intention might escape the audience's attention, what with the actress being part of a large crowd on stage. Therefore, as she manifests her hatred, Sowa stands not only close to Guślarz, the rite's master, but also to the character who is speaking at that moment. Thus the audience, focusing on the speaker, can appreciate Sowa's action, which plays a significant role in Swinarski's staging. The intentionality of such staging ploys is seen even more clearly in the next scene when a shepherdess who takes part in the rite sees the ghost of her late lover. As they exchange glances, she makes only one move; the expression on her face also changes but once. The audience could easily overlook this insignificant symptom of the girl's pain, but for Guślarz's command to fetch the aspergillum from the altar, given at that very moment. As the audience cast their eyes on a young lad who approaches the shepherdess and takes the aspergillum lying next to her, they can see the young woman look down. Thus, even though it was the man's movement that drew the audience's attention, what mattered was the girl's facial expression.

That is why the definition of an ostensive act has to contain the concept of directing one's attention, and not merely pointing directly to an object or activity. Very important in the theater is also the understanding of ostension as intensifying attention, and it I not possible to speak of binary oppositions here. In other words, the recipient's attention may prove unsatisfactory for a proper reception of the performance. Irina Rudakova (1995: 59), describing Stein's failure in restaging Stanislawski's *Three Sisters*, demonstrates how differences in ideas about the world make realism of the turn of the centuries seem like a completely exotic world to contemporary Russian audience watching Stein's actors. As a result the recipients were interested in scenes that the audience of a hundred years back treated as ordinary and of no import, e.g.

> "ceremonies of unfamiliar life which in some instances […] completely overshadowed the action. For example the love scene between Masha and Vershinin in the second act was totally lost. It took place mid-stage in the living room with the lights off. In Stein's production, while the actors played the scene, upstage in the dining room the maid adjusted the candles in the wall candelabra. The foregrounding of the decorative details focused our attention on her actions as aesthetically significant, and the fact that she was well lit while the central characters conducted their conversation in the semi-darkness, drew our attention to her even closer. As a result, we remember a curious cup with a very long handle that she used to extinguish the candles or the strange matches she used to light them" (*ibidem*: 58–59).

It would seem that the Russians are too familiar with Chekov and so the maid's intriguing actions only should vitalize the restaged production without any significant harm for the performance. Yet Rudakova reminds us of the special role that the emotional aspect of events on stage played in Stanislawski's productions. The rendition of subtle emotional states responsible for the characters' behaviour after all requires a particularly focused attention on the audience's part. And so if Stein's ambition was

to attain the dramatic result of Stanislawski's production, he should have avoided the unnecessary effects distracting the audience's attention.

These findings, though, do not apply to some types of comedy, where exaggerated gesticulation and garish make-up play a role. If the audience were to follow stage images closely, they might figure out what lies behind the illusion or notice some unnaturalness. To prevent that, action is often fast-paced, so the audience can only see its 'rough outline' that builds up the humour of the events. Thus, manipulating audience's attention entails taking into account intended goals as well as conventions and techniques used in acting. Unless it is realized, tragic actors appearing on a small stage can suddenly become grotesque, as reported on several occasions by theatre historians; their artificial gestures and unnatural make-up get noticed by the audience following the acting at close quarters.

## Object and relation – what ostension shows

Another inconsistency in the description of ostension in the cognitive process stems from curtailing its area of activity to a set of individual objects, entirely ignoring the relations that underlie any cognitive act. Highlighting of any sort derives from a stage relation: estrangement (as regards current beliefs about the world), misbalance between stage elements or pointing (at something) that is convention-governed. However, merely acknowledging the existence of a relation does not unequivocally determine which of its elements should be highlighted.

Theatre best exemplifies that by actors' ostensive behaviour on stage. In principle, any action on stage is related, in one way or another, to the surrounding reality; thus the relation between the actor and the reality around him is of a permanent nature. If we think of a person looking at an object, highlighting applies not to one, but to two elements from among all the stage components – the object that the actor is looking at, and the look itself. In Pavis's analysis of the hierarchical structure determined by Sade and Cordey's behaviour, the scene's *punctum* was a dagger – the object that both characters were looking at. However, one can also think of an interpretation whereby the blade is merely a pretext to express feelings such as fear or determination, just like the dagger that Gustaw holds in Swinarski's *Forefathers' Eve*. Thus, even though everyone in the audience can clearly see Gustaw raise the weapon as he reaches the climax of his monologue, what matters is the vigour of this gesture that expresses the onerous moral choices Gustaw has to make. Another, albeit less apparent, example is that of women arriving at the rite and kneeling in front of a picture of the Virgin Mary. Is it about the symbolic connotations of the picture or about the mixing up of a pagan tradition and Catholicism (cf. the custom of kneeling)?

It becomes even more complex to determine which element is of greatest relevance to a given scene when we take into account the fact that a relation itself is also subject to highlighting. To bring back the example of meaningful looks, let us return to the scene of the Lover's Ghost and the Shepherdess form Swinarski's *Forefathers' Eve*. As he looks at her, she returns the look; so the image is complemented by the mutual relation between the two characters.

The concept of relation also underlies such significant elements of the play's structure as contrast and surprise. A critic discussing Brook's play *Marat/Sade* was astounded to see a room tiled white where gaudily dressed characters were executing aristocrats. The white tiles must have been as curious to the English audience as loud costumes and grotesque acting. What was key to the *mise en scène*, though, was the very contrast between the cold, sterile interior of the lunatic asylum and the insane string of events shown by the patients.

Surprise, in turn, is accounted for by the temporal arrangement of events, when a customary image is blurred by a discord. For example, when Giorgio Strehler adjusts the first scene of *King Lear* to a rite deeply rooted in tradition, the *mise en scène* shows a solemn, church-like choir, a somewhat archaic variation on the feudal rite, with clear references to the notorious Shakespearean declarations of parental love; this ritual equilibrium later on develops into verbal cacophony (after Strehler 1982: 305). Here the caesura is marked out by Cordelia's meaningful "nothing". Strehler argues that the essence of the scene is only explicable when one takes into account the destruction of the old order. According to him, Cordelia commits sacrilege and Lear, quite understandably, loses his temper. In order to appreciate that, though, the audience have to grasp the discord in the music that delineates the order of the rite, and make it the main reference point of the staging. The unexpected dissonance should be strong enough to surpass the discussion on the rationale of cultivating or discarding the old order. Thus the *mise en scène* is interpreted quite differently due to shifting the meaning focus from the very relation determined by the surprising change of tack to the elements that it highlights. The audience can therefore see either the court's fossilization against Cordelia's honesty, or the onset of a youthful rebellion against the old order.

Thus, the very existence of ostension on stage does not mean that the suggestion is no longer open to interpretation. Whenever the light is seen again after a prolonged spell of darkness, the audience have to decide on their own whether it signifies revelation, highlights the darkness prior to the light, or draws attention to the change. However, to take the decision conceptualization is required; thus, situational context influences the process of drawing relevant conclusions. This issue will be discussed in detail elsewhere in the work.

## Key (cleft) signs

According to Martin Esslin (*op.cit.*: 109–111), key (or cleft) signs play a special role in the reception of a theatrical performance. Like other acts of ostension, they indicate the significant components of the *mise en scène*. However, key signs do not help to highlight a single element of the performance, but establish a modality of reception that operates over a period of time or applies to a selection of signs. We can therefore speak of "prolonged ostension". Occasionally key signs have to be repeated for the prolonged effect to obtain, but most of the time, quite obviously, a given modality of reception lasts until there are grounds for it to be changed. If a theatrical performance sets out to introduce a realistic world, its realism gets reaffirmed as we interpret new events as realistic.

Esslin exemplifies the realism-enhancing function of key signs by discussing the change from unrhymed poetry to prose. He compares key signs to musical keys. However, when singling out a particular system of signs as fundamental in the reception of other signs, we tend to reconfirm the focal position of a system among other systems. A typical strategy to do that is augmenting contrast between elements of a system at the expense of other systems. Umberto Eco brings up music as an example. He argues that the notes of a scale are like figures that combine to make meaningful signs, such as chords or intervals. The meaning, though, is of a syntactic rather than semantic kind. Chords and intervals, in turn, combine to make musical syntagms. This musical sequence is universally recognizable regardless of the instrument that plays it or the tone; if a musician chooses to alter the tone with every note he plays, though, what comes out is a sequence of tones rather than a tune. Consequently, the note ceases to be relevant and becomes facultative. What is relevant is the tone (Eco 1971: 198). As we can see, the set of meaningful elements in this case is determined not by a single choice, but as a result of divergence that highlights a given system.

More explicit examples of this phenomenon can be found in Sugiera's monograph on Grzegorzewski and his plays. Key signs, as presented by Esslin, operate in plays described in the chapter titled *The First Scene: The Key to the Performance*. Sugiera describes the first scene of Grzegorzewski's *America*:

> "Grzegorzewski decided to place the seats for the audience on the stage, thereby moving stage events to the nearby foyer and cloakroom. […] The audience became even more disconcerted when the lights went out and, in place of actors, they were shown other viewers leaving the theatre, as another spectacle had just finished. […] The busy crowd in the cloakroom could be transposed as the stage world; they were like travelers disembarking a ship that had just arrived in America. […] However, were one to regard the scene merely as a typical real-life situation, going home after a spot of evening entertainment, one would involuntarily be peeping rather than watching. This would be awkward, especially that our notional »peeping Tom« had just left his own coat there and primped in front of the cloakroom mirror. […] Thus the actions of the involuntary subjects of this theatrical experiment took on different meanings; they became theatre or 'theatre', depending on the audience's interpretation, with no involvement on the part of the subjects, the quasi-actors. […] This was Grzegorzewski's way to point up the creative character of perception, the potential discord between the conclusions of the perceiver and the intention of the perceived. This is also how he would present his audience with the k e y [emphasis] to comprehending or, better still, to identifying with Rossman, the protagonist. Rossman attempted to discover the intentions of strangers he met in America in very much the same way. Devoid of clear premises, he would put the new definitions within the interpretative framework of the Old World" (Sugiera 1993: 75).

The ploy that Grzegorzewski implemented in the first scene of his staging threw the audience off balance, thus helping them appreciate the protagonist's actions. This created the right modality of reception.

Grzegorzewski's staging of *The Threepenny Opera*, where "the first scene is a sheer medley of theatrical conventions and styles" (*ibidem*: 185) is another example of this practice. Sugiera claims that this staging technique aims at "distorting Brecht's apparent division into stage events and commentaries and ridding the audience of whatever conveniently simple preconceptions about stage fiction they may have, even before the story of Mac the Knife starts. Thus the audience's uncertainty as to the status of the world they perceive lasts virtually until the end of the performance" (*ibidem*: 180).

However, uncertainty is not the only reason behind the mixing up of various theatrical traditions at the beginning of the play. To quote Sugiera again, "in his staging of *The Threepenny Opera* Grzegorzewski teases the audience toying with twisted and broken reflections of stage styles and conventions" (*ibidem*: 185). Thus a system appears, whereby theatrical styles and conventions function as main systems of signs and bind the unfolding events together. This particular role is being brought to mind throughout the entire performance, according to the aforementioned principle. An example is the scene when Peachum's enterprise turns out to be a genuine theatre, set up not through greed but through the joy of pretending and fibbing. In this way audience expectations, a result of theatrical competence, are 'questioned', producing the effect of estrangement. Another technique that Grzegorzewski employs are contrastive alterations of acting styles, referred to by Eco. The short scene at a brothel opens up with Mrs Peachum's sexual song sung like an aria. Then comes a melancholic and impressionistic description of the brothel, complemented by Jenny's truthful song of love gone by. Suddenly, though, the song is intercepted, and we hear a vibrating voice sing farcical operetta as prostitutes run away from police officers – all that to the sound of cancan. By piling up instances of scenic fiction Grzegorzewski succeeded in disclosing their untruthful nature, thus making his own contribution to Brecht's principle of revealing theatrical tricks of the trade (*ibidem*: 184).

As we can see from the analyses quoted above, Esslin's concept of key signs gives an adequate description of cognitive mechanisms that are reflected in staging interpretations. Esslin's theory seems to be imprecise in but one aspect, that is to say it lacks a clear-cut division into key signs that determine the correct modality of reception, and techniques which serve to highlight a system of signs amongst other systems. A common feature of both processes is the effect of the techniques that spans several scenes of a play. A sign system or modality of reception categorized for once at the beginning of a play influences interpretation throughout the play, even if the technique that was used to categorize it is no longer present on stage.

## Summary

The analysis of ostensive activities in the theater presented in this chapter has used examples in relation to only the first stage of the cognitive process. This first stage comprises reception acts governed by rules of perception and impressions resulting from the clash between ideas and the image of the world received by the senses. "Attention" plays an important role also at the next stages of processing the information connected with processes of conceptualization, the effects of which can influence indirectly our perception of the world. Most importantly however, I have meant to place ostension within the framework of those cognitive processes that are of a prenotional nature. This can help to describe acts of direct impact that on-stage reality has upon the recipient. Such acts shape the process of watching those elements of a play that are directly observable. That in turn makes it possible to explain not only the

differences between particular interpretations, but also between perceptions of the same phenomenon by different recipients.

So understood, ostension acts do not refer unequivocally to certain meanings, but constitute their basis. Moreover, they allow us to describe the character of a given dramatic school or the works of a director. Let us have a look at a few telling examples. Rebelling against fossilized tradition, early XX century theater shocked its audience with farcical images of the world. On the one hand, it distorted the shapes of objects and the spatial perspective of stage. On the other hand, it was geared towards at times surprising simplifications. The audience would find it difficult to find rationalizations for expressionist solutions. The English critic James Agate, impressed by one of Kaiser's plays, was unable to explain why "the image of four men, waving their silk-hats rhythmically in a lunatic ballet should be closer to the truth about races than a faithful, photographic representation of their behaviour" (Styan 1995: 340). Audiences were also surprised by new rules of stage production, introduced by directors who were first of all breaking the dramatic conventions of presenting on-stage reality. "In the case of Appia, the need to go against what the audience was used to, meant that Wagner's heroes would most often be portrayed as two-dimensional silhouettes against a light background. Also, Appia substituted traditional acting on the proscenium with activities taking place further back on the stage, with the foot-lights off and the foreground immersed in darkness" (Sugiera 1995: 22). A contrast differentiating particular elements of the production was also achieved by a simplification consisting in removing insignificant elements of stage design or limiting characters' movements to a necessary minimum. Such an approach was manifest in Brook's "gesture of rejection". The same principle was referred to by Brecht, who made static his stage images in order to highlight the moment of movement, signaling a change relationships between characters. Those examples are evidence of the fact that the character of particular dramatic schools and directors' approaches can be described by the character of ostensive activities used.

The special nature of describing ostensive activities can also be noticed in dramatic doctrines and theories. In his anthropological approach to acting, Barba opines that oppositions in the body's position are central to meaning. His model is thus in agreement with the assumptions of anthropological theatre where man becomes the focal meaning-shaping factor. With a certain degree of approximation one can also say that the same holds good for phenomenology, where man is a psycho-physiological foundation on which a theatrical character is structured. To refer to Raszewski's view of the actor who "sows" fiction, it might be said that the actual actor in theatre sows acts of ostension.

A clear link can be seen between classifying individual directors' works and types of *mise en scène* on the basis of the acts of ostension that they use and the division that has been applied to research thus far. Analysing ostensive behaviour, though, one can leave out the issue of recipient competence, understood as comprehensive familiarity with various trends and styles in theatre. The ability to identify features of individual theatrical techniques and doctrines does not entail being familiar with them. Thus generalisations in reviews are compatible with the audience's direct impressions of what goes on on stage. That a performance should fall under a particular staging category, therefore, is determined by the character of acts of ostension experienced during the performance.

As a fundamental element of communication, ostension is at the same time a significant facet in characterising individual staging activities and trends. An investigation of ostensive activities as decisive in selecting elements of a *mise en scène* can lead to a desired hierarchy of meanings. Therefore a link can be established between conclusions drawn on the basis of observable elements of a performance and the structure of the mental representation of the world shown on stage. To simplify, elements highlighted by acts of ostension (also in mental structures) are superior to the others.

Another aspect of ostension under analysis in this dissertation is that ostensive behaviour reveals the addressee's communicative intention. From the recipient's perspective, the assumption extends to the effect that each act of focusing attention implies relevance. The significance of the above in theatre has been declared by many practitioners. Peter Brook recalls being in awe of a Hindu performer who could get passers-by's attention merely with the help of his little finger. A number of other European artists are similarly impressed by the extraordinary ability of eastern theatres to produce plays of special significance to the given culture, thus immensely attractive to locals.

Having said all that, one could conclude that manipulating audience's attention is one of the skills that make authors of performances genuine artists. Obviously, a performance that is void of attention-getting elements is dismissed as downright boring. On the other hand, abundance of acts of ostension is likely to be seen as exhausting and result in overlooking significant staging activities. Similarly, a performance where excessive attention is drawn to irrelevant facts is bound to cause annoyance. Therefore ostensive behaviour should ideally strike a viable balance between explicitness (so they can be noticed by the audience) and significance of the resulting interpretations. Whether or not certain ostensive activities are suitable is ultimately for critics to decide. Theorising can only produce a model of significant relations holding in the case of acts of ostension.

The cast and the directors on the other side of the stage have no universal paradigms of behaviour in store for the audience, so they could determine the realisation of acts of ostension. The theory behind can be of considerable assistance, but artists can only take final decisions as long as they implement their intuition and talent. But, after all, this is what makes them artists, not mere craftsmen who act according to pre-learned schemata. For it is thanks to their intuition that they can attract audiences, make them come to the theatre, experience a product of art, and thus verify the rationale for the existence of an aesthetic object.

## 3. A METHODOLOGY FOR OSTENSION RESEARCH IN THEATRE

Both this chapter, concerning practical implications of the model proposed in this thesis, and some methodological propositions for studying cognitive structures (see the next chapter) will limit themselves to being merely outlines of basic methodological

assumptions. All the studies presented here focus on reception, striving to find some regularities in the process.

Attention, which is here understood as perception of events and objects, essentially manifests itself in simple actions. However, as we have seen, selection among the many mechanisms of focusing attention is not determined a priori, thus the rationale behind it can only be explained if one studies the decisions made on the basis of subjective feelings. There are scientific methods of analysing stress or eyeball movement. However, they do not encompass all the activities the recipient can engage in to "activate his attention". It becomes necessary, therefore, to refer to a method where conclusions are borne out in several sources.

Let us start with language. Cognitivism has it that images and their expression in natural language are linked, which can be seen in text structure. It appears acceptable, therefore, to assume that elements that are highlighted in a scene's description by the way it is linguistically formulated are also central to perception. In the terminology of Russian formalism each act of language de-automatisation entails an act of ostension in sensual perception.

Let us go back to Sugiera's paper on Grzegorzewski's *Dziesięć portretów z czajką w tle* (based on Chechov) and see how she describes the set: „The proscenium and the stage are separated by a grey curtain, not fully drawn back. To the right there is an empty, gutted grand piano. A structure of several wooden frames runs toward the niche in the rear wall. To the left a large white wardrobe comes into view. Behind it there is another curtain made of red velvet, much smaller than the other one. In the background, centre-stage, there is a cupboard; behind it, an object not clearly visible, but looking vaguely like a railway timetable booklet" (Sugiera 1993: 105). One might say it is just a typical description of stage paraphernalia. However, the text is fraught with practically all types of ostension discussed in the previous chapter. A typical method of highlighting objects in descriptions is using marked expressions. Incidentally, these are also the least conscious of the forms that authors use. The first object that Sugiera pinpoints is a gutted piano. The metaphor clearly distinguishes the instrument which is present on stage in Grzegorzewski's play from an object one might find in a rustic room. Similarly, the "grey curtain, not fully drawn back" is a departure from convention which prescribes that as the play starts the curtain should disappear from sight (enstrangement). The thing that looks remotely like a railway brochure is the only movable object here; it is interesting because of its mysterious, blurred outline. Finally there is the conspicuous white wardrobe ("comes into view"). The author underlines the impression one gets looking at the object. The expression 'a structure of several wooden frames runs toward the niche in the rear wall' is a direct description of the way the audience perceive this set element. In line with the rules of optical perception, the gaps between frames appear smaller and smaller, thus signalling the direction one looks in.

The example above shows that Sugiera describes object by means of marked expressions such as metaphors or hyperboles, acts of enstrangement, highlighting perception ("comes into view") and pointing to objects (not all of them have actually been mentioned). So as not to fall into the trap of subjective assessment and to verify the thesis that the particular place of objects in the description has to do with actual sensual impressions, we must look elsewhere for confirmation.

As far as subjectivity is concerned, the matter appears simple enough. Since other critics point to the same objects, we can readily assume that there is some regularity in perception and try to compare our results with the assumptions that performance directors have made. The possibility to highlight an object in different ways helps to make experimental data more objective. Walaszek in her description of Swinarski's staging of The Forefathers' Eve is clear about the way perception takes place when she says "In sight there is Golgotha in mourning robes" (Walaszek *op.cit.*: 189). This image is also brought up by Marta Fik: "Going slowly to the chapel for the rite, passing by the church mourners and the image of the crucified one we are really entering the play…" (Fik *op.cit.*: 194). By putting the image in different contexts we become convinced that it has arisen as a result of perception rather than interpretation of the play. To further confirm whether an action or an object perform an ostensive function one can inquire a greater number of viewers. However, there arises a problem that is actually common for all questionnaires; direct questions suggest answers, which often obscures actual reception. There are certain ways to tackle this problem, but they will only be mentioned in the chapter on cognitive domains. At this stage we can only analyse the marked expressions in performance descriptions that can act as verbal expressions of ostension.

The first way to do so, quite naturally, is to study a substantial range of opinions about the same fragment of a play. The fragment ought to include an event we want to analyse and be fairly short, otherwise individual viewers' interpretations will rely heavily on their memory, and events will be singled out at random, due to subjective interpretations of the whole play. What we want to analyse is how particular scenes of a *mise en scène* are perceived and whether they are viewed as acts of ostension or not. If most testees use marked expressions to describe an event, one might assume that the given scene attracted their attention.

The next step to take is to verify the marked expressions, trying to arrive at their origin. This is done to determine whether a figure of speech used in the text serves mostly to highlight an action or object, or merely to specify its characteristics. To exemplify, Walaszek describes the character of Sowa in the scene with the Ghost of the Evil Master saying: "Now she clambers up the table" (Walaszek *op.cit.*: 192). To decide whether clamber describes the movement or merely highlights the character, a greater number of testees who have seen the play can be asked to decide which expression: the marked "clamber" or the neutral "climb" is a more accurate description of the action Sowa takes. If most testees decide on "climb", then the marked "clamber" appears to have been used merely for the sake of underlying the ostensive function of the character's action.

Discussing the analyses in question here one should mention the use of video recording, often criticised. The critical remarks are frequently unfounded. To stick to the example of Sowa in Swinarski's staging: it suffices to watch a videotape to determine whether the word clamber is used appropriately. However, the staging assumptions may change when the play is adapted for film rather than recorded as a play.

The problem can be solved if the researcher is familiar with the theatre version and knows when and to what extent a video recording arouses feelings similar to those that a genuine theatre audience have. Another advantage of using recordings for analysis is that in cases where the impressions of those watching the recording and those watching the actual play are different, one might conclude that it is the theatre environment that

makes a scene be perceived in a special way. Assuming that there is some kind of tension which arises when a viewer meets an actor in the flesh, it seems appropriate to say that a scene generating such tension in theatre will not make any particular impression on the television audience. However, trying to estimate the extent to which the audience react to stage events one should always refer directly to their theatre experience.

Assuming that we want to concentrate solely on the audience's spontaneous reactions, the only reliable tool is dynamic research, especially when it uses modern technology; it makes it possible to record audience's reactions, determine where they are looking thanks to specialized spectacles, or even to examine their breathing, which, apparently, may coincide with the rhythm of the dialogue being delivered on stage. These methods have been debased as their results cannot be correlated with semantic processes that shape the meaning of events. They can be made more meaningful if juxtaposed with the results of the above-mentioned analysis of staging descriptions, as there is more evidence for fragments pre-selected as acts of ostension. If a testee's reactions measured by means of scientific equipment accord with the scenes that the testee highlights in their description, then firstly an intensified reaction on the part of the recipient is borne out as playing a role in shaping meaning, and secondly it becomes more likely that a figure of speech reflects reception rather than intellectual speculation or linguistic habits.

In conclusion, our experimental model seen as a collection of analyses has its rationale in confirming conclusions that can be drawn by looking at various forms of theatrical expression, from spontaneous physiological reactions to expressing opinions in a natural language. They can be further verified by our knowledge of universal rules of perception. One must bear in mind, though, that the results refer to observation. Therefore, although the theory of relevance acknowledges that identified acts of ostension play an active role in cognition, their influence on interpreting meanings can only be fully appreciated if the entire cognitive process is analysed, together with two notions that will be of our interest in the next two chapters, that is conceptualisation and relevance.

(a) This is an orchid.
(b) Orchids are rare flowers.
Conclusion:
(c) This is a rare flower.

This conclusion is in line with principles of logic, but calculating such statements provides no explanation why we tend to opt for a particular solution, the number of solutions resulting from the information provided being virtually unlimited. Given that (a) and (b) are true statements, the following set: "This is an orchid", "Orchids are rare flowers", "This is not a tree", also holds good. However, most of us will undoubtedly agree that (c) appears to be the most feasible conclusion. Sperber and Wilson argue for the existence of a principle guiding human reasoning that they call the principle of not drawing trivial conclusions. Thus, if one says "The Prime Minister quit his job", one has to dismiss the following, logically true, statements: "It is not true that the Prime Minister did not quit his job" and "If it's the Queen's birthday today, the Prime Minister quit his job" – the former, on grounds of triviality, the latter, even pure nonsense. Merely acknowledging that one can limit a potentially unlimited number of possible solutions does not explain the rationale behind models of logical reasoning. Cognitive sciences, on the other hand, claim that logic is not acquired at birth, but rather learned through experience and conceptualisation based on spatial thinking.

Let us return to deductive processes that make it possible to infer that, if a purse is in a bag and the bag is in the kitchen, the purse, by extension, is in the kitchen too. Do we apply logical formulas to find a purse, though? Or do we rather rely on experience that has us go to the kitchen first to open our bag and get the purse? A more clear-cut example (albeit a more complex one) can be that of someone lost in a forest, who decides to walk in one direction without turning, hoping that they can reach a town by doing so. In this case our understanding is based on experience (I always do that and it has always worked) or a heuristic analysis that consists in conjuring up the image of a map and several straight lines that sooner or later will reach a human settlement. This method does not have to be foolproof, but reasoning is not only about drawing logically correct conclusions, but also less plausible ones. These conclusions are based on heuristic methods in which human imagination works; they can, though, stimulate understanding, which is often the key factor in achieving an objective. As one can imagine, an attempt to guide one's way out of an unfamiliar forest solely by calculating logical statements would doubtless result in the poor thinker dying of starvation. Undoubtedly, then, when we decide on the nature of the reality that surrounds us, we use images of reality stored in our mind, stemming from our experience, that is interaction with the outside world; at least, these images are available for us to use.

Mark Turner provides a charming example that illustrates how imagination can be deployed to tackle a problem:

> "A Buddhist monk begins at dawn to walk up a mountain. He stops and starts and varies his pace as he pleases, and reaches the mountaintop at sunset. There he meditates overnight. At dawn, he begins to walk back down, again moving as he pleases. He reaches the foot of the mountain at sunset. Prove that there is a place on the path that he occupies at the same hour of the day on the two separate journeys" (Turner 1996: 72).

There must be a way to solve this problem in a formalised manner. However, it is much easier to imagine two monks, one going up, and the other – on the same day – going down. Their meeting point is the place in question. This, once again, goes to

show that conjuring up images is an equally successful way of reasoning about the outside world. As it is, though, the nature of our mental perception of the world is not identical with genuine reality. As we were answering the question that Turner posed, we schematised our mental image of the monk's route. It was reduced to a line linking the mountaintop and its foot. Similarly, the spot where the monk and his double meet is an abstract point along the line that represents the route. Schematising certain aspects of our perception of the situation that Turner presents helps enhance one's train of thought, simultaneously ignoring irrelevant details – where, for example, the down-bound monk chooses to walk down another path and never runs into the up-bound one. That could happen if we were to picture a mountain road with all its details, for instance forking or parted with trees.

Mental processes that cognitivists tackle in their work are based on such more or less schematised structures. Some of them are universal and have been singled out to form a set of basic cognitive parameters:

- Basic ontological categories: being, state, event, action, situation.
- Aspects: attributes, behaviour.
- Shape of events: preserving – creative, destructive, one-time – repetitive, complete – incomplete, cyclical – noncyclical.
- Causal relations: forcing, enabling.
- Image schema: part – whole, centre – periphery, up – down, link, source – path – destination, container.
- Modality: ability, possibility, necessity.

Those cognitive domains, in tandem with logical formulae, form the basis of human reasoning; universal as they are, they specify common reasoning rules.

It is wrong, therefore, to treat cognitive semantics as a revolution that discards previous models for description of mental processes; what it does is rather supplement these with reasoning forms based on image structures that go beyond formal logic. However, simply acknowledging mental structures does not suffice to explain the process of conceptualisation. For that reason this section will go on to select, out of the wide range of categories which determine conceptualisation, only those issues which can help both characterise basic assumptions of cognitive grammar and analyse the process of comprehending a theatrical performance.

## Perception of reality

Any human mental activity is rooted in all kinds of interaction that man has with reality. However, events shown on stage do not normally bring about any direct consequences for the audience, as its members are conventionally at a safe distance from the actors and the world that they present. In middle-class theatre what the recipient normally does is watch and listen, and their reaction is normally applause or other signs of approval or disapproval. Therefore it appears reasonable to start our description of cognition by characterising the concept of human perception of material things. An exceptionally synthetic and clear presentation of this issue can be found in Elzbieta Tabakowska's *Gramatyka i obrazowanie* (*Grammar and Images*). Tabakowska stresses the dual nature of the world in our perception.

> "Its picture is composed of a multitude of things and connections between them. This duality, which stems from sensual experience of elementary physical phenomena, is also reflected in the duality of conceptual structures. One of the fundamental principles of generating such structures in the human mind is the dichotomy of thing and relation (emphasis – E.T.)" (Tabakowska 1995a: 23–27).

The "thing" is understood as something that occupies an area in space, that can retain the state it is in (until it becomes the object of a relation which changes that state), and whose existence in a given time and space is not significantly dependent on its relation to other things. Tabakowska cites a simple example of table, an object which has "particular dimensions, shape and texture, […] and can exist without necessarily entering into relations with other things" (*ibidem*). She goes on to point out that, obviously, the most generic things are material ones; at the same time she stresses that the human mind perceives abstract notions and real, existing objects in the same way. It is possible due to our ability to handle concepts in mental space, whose properties are analogous to those of three-dimensional space. Let us, for example, consider the concept of quarrel. "It has its own internal structure (e.g. a beginning and an end)", one can have it, runaway from it, one can also take it elsewhere. Thus the properties we attribute to the concept of quarrel are equivalent to those that characterise physical objects in 3-d space.

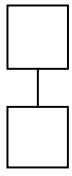
As she goes on to describe relations, Tabakowska underlines that:

> "unlike things, generic relations tend to take place in time, so they are dynamic in character. They result in objects changing their state; in this sense the notion of relation is a nonautonomous one, as the existence of a relation entails the existence of objects it obtains between. The most typical relations are obviously physical processes based in the phenomenon of movement. However, as it is the case with things, movement can be understood as a change in configuration of abstract objects that enter into particular relations with each other in mental space" (*ibidem*: 25).

In cognitive semantics, things and relations form the basis for analysing cognitive domains. Ronald Langacker introduced a notation to help present sets of elements and relalions that make up particular semantic categories. Out of the complex system for classifying semantic categories proposed by Langacker, let us mention three basic symbols:

to denote things

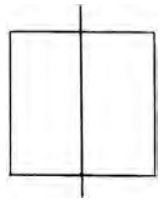
to denote any unit



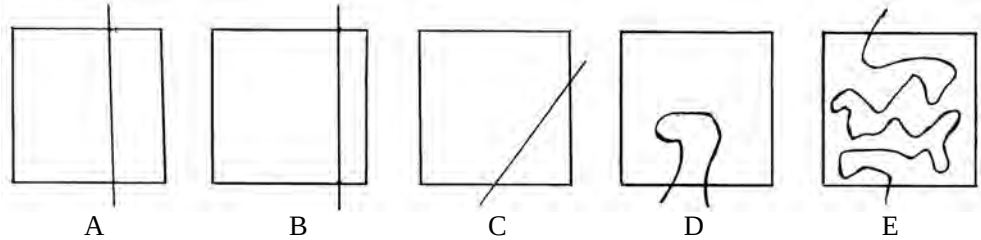
to denote relations

Other, more complex symbols will be introduced at a later stage, when particular analyses are presented.

The aforementioned image schemata also belong to the category of cognitive domains, as described by Langacker. These form the foundations of cognitive operations of the human mind, as they are schematic and at the same time rooted in man's motor experience. It may seem that all these operations can be explained by traditional formulae of logical reasoning. The mental picture of the world, though, cannot be reduced to formulas that clearly determine the nature of particular concepts. A typical situation that defies a univocal definition is a relation that obtains between a moving object and a fragment of space, which is described by the preposition "across". To simplify, let us assume that the fragment of space we are interested in is an area in the shape of a square. The least doubtful situation is the one where a given person crosses one of the rectangle's sides exactly in the middle and then, walking on in that direction, leaves the area, crossing the opposite side – again, in the middle.



Without a shadow of a doubt, we will agree that the sentence "The person went across the square" adequately describes the situation. However, does any other route that runs within the area of the square actually go across it? A number of works in cognitive semantics have attempted to answer this question. Without going into details, let me present several figures along with a few comments on the issue in question.




Figures A and B are gradual departures from the canonical model where the route goes through the middle of the area. In fact, both appear to fall under the category denoted by the preposition "across", but as the line symbolising the route gets nearer the side of the rectangle, our doubts as to whether it is still going "across" the area grow. Is walking along the side of the area actually going across it? Example C is even more controversial. In extreme cases we could even say that the person barely entered the area. Example D, on the other hand, appears to contradict the way we see going "across" an area. As for E, it is perhaps more suitable to say that the person had a walk

around the area. To answer the question whether a given situation represents going "across an area", one has to establish a suitable model that would present the representational image of the preposition "across". For our discussion it is more important to attract attention to some relevant aspects of a model like that than to actually arrive at a definite solution.

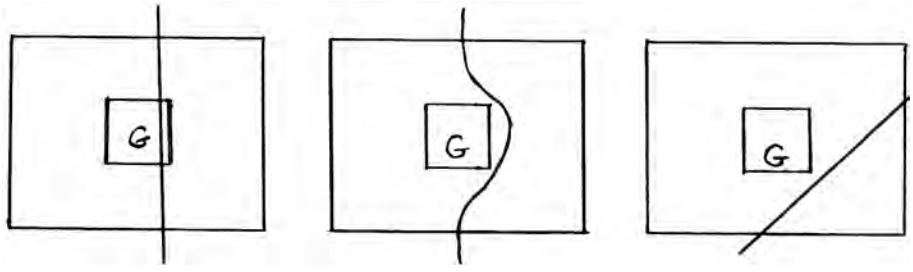
To start with, the model is an image-oriented one. Thus our decision whether an event qualifies as going across an area depends on the mental image we activate in our consciousness. The image is most likely to appear as a prototype, a paradigm of a category that we compare individual situations to. In our example, it is the perfect model, a straight line that cuts across the two longer sides of the rectangle, right in the middle. It is not uncommon for prototypes, though, to be of a different character. There may be prototypes depicting typical situations. To see the difference between both concepts, Lakoff suggests considering the differences between a typical husband and an ideal one. In order to define the concept of "husband", one can draw from the idealised model of the function that a man performs in the family unit, or refer to typical examples from family life that make up the image of a husband. In the model under analysis here, whether or not an action qualifies as "going across an area" is dependent on the ideal model. Thus, the farther the route departs from the square's axis (A and B), the more difficult it is to accept a given situation as "going across" an area. If the beginning and the end of the route are not on opposite sides of the square (C and D), a given case is less likely to be regarded as "going across" that square. Finally, the less the actual route resembles the model straight line (E), the more difficult it is to classify a given case as "going across" the area in question.

Another significant aspect of schematised image models is how deeply they are rooted in human experience. Earlier we discussed an experiment based on deductive processes; now we may want to consider some experiments that lie at the bottom of a prototypical model of the preposition "across". It is in line with the principles of cognitivism, which have it that image schemata are based on experiments connected with human activity.

An illustrative example is that of walking across the road or crossing a river. That must be where the idea of moving to the opposite side of an area comes from. Why, though, are we also inclined to accept the use of "across" to describe the situation shown in figure C? Or, what is the actual difference between figure C and figure D, if we assume that the area is not a model rectangle, but rather a figure with no angles at all? To answer such queries one often refers to models that use rules of topology which depict the transition process from a prototype to its numerous variations. While not undermining the role of theoretical models portraying the transformation of a prototypical image, one has to note that they ignore the influence of situational context, which is superimposed on the abstract representation of an image schema, thus completing the set of criteria for classifying a given action as "going across" an area. How far from the edge (figure A and B) the agent is supposed to have been so one can say without doubt that the action qualifies as "going across" the area, largely depends on the situational context of the given action.

Let us imagine a group of young boys who want to prove their manhood and dare each other to cross somebody else's field. The owner will not have any trespassers cross his territory and is determined to punish them if they do. Needless to say, not every route that the boys choose will qualify as going across the inhospitable owner's

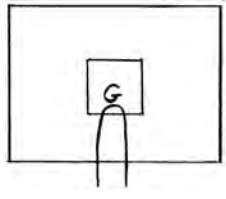
field. Let us assume that to do the task successfully one must come as close as possible to the owner's house, so a possible escape would not be easy. If we mark the "hazardous approximation" area as *G*,




H I J

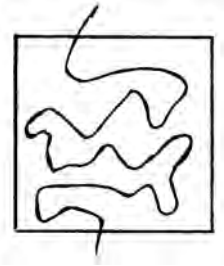
we can assume that the actions shown as figures H and J will qualify, whereas the boy who took the route shown in figure I will be accused of going around, rather than across the owner's field.

This example illustrates how situational context (here the conditions of the challenge that the boys agree on) specifies the characteristics of the abstract image model. It is the subjective feeling of danger rather than the topological characteristics of the concept "across" that determines the route's length. The above also holds good for "going across" a mountain ridge. In order for an action to qualify as going across the ridge, the route must not go too close to the ridge's end or where the peaks run too low. However, the word "too" is to some extent determined by a subjective assessment of the task's level of difficulty, which accompanies the idea of going across a mountain ridge. The reason why the abstract spatial model and subjective psychical aspects are compounded is the motor-experience basis of image schemata, which anchors the abstract image of the movement "across" in a particular experience. The actual action, in turn, is normally linked to such psychical aspects as the feeling of being threatened, the task's level of difficulty or the pleasure it carries. One way or the other, the movement which qualifies as 'going across an area' has to correspond to its abstract image. The route shown below would probably not qualify as "going across" an area.




It is so because the requirement of moving to the other side of the rectangle, specified by the schematised image of the relations marked by the preposition "across", has not been fulfilled. Merely entering the area marked *G* is just a criterion completing the image schema, which helps determine the minimum distance required for the route to qualify as a convincing example of "going across" the field in question.

How to qualify the movement shown in figure E will also depend on placing the model in the right context, this time situational.



E

Assuming that the rectangle symbolises a meadow, one cannot possibly say that the figure shows movement across the meadow. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the figure can symbolise going across a "forest". The necessity to find one's way among trees (which is a consequence of the situational context determining the characteristics of a given area, here – a forest) helps treat the requirement of the route being as straight as possible as somewhat less significant.

The fact that schematised images are rooted in everyday experience is consistent with one of the fundamental principles of cognitivism, which says that categories are a reflection of our perception of the world, our motor activity in it, as well as the goals we set. The schematic character of images helps combine particular experiences, which form into complex cognitive domains only if they are, to an extent, schematised. As it is, imagination is based on co-operation between schematic models and an array of images: experience and perception. The researcher's task is to pinpoint and interpret the relations that hold between both types of images.

## Fillmore's social and sociological frames

Taking into consideration the relations that hold between schematised images and our experience of the world helps put subjective experience into universal frames arranging our world knowledge. Generalised forms of thinking, shared by a large group of people, are not limited to abstract conceptual forms. Individual cultures and social groups have a lot of more detailed models of actions, attitudes and expectations shared by the members of a given community. They take the form of scripts characterising relevant action points, one by one. They also provide matrices that are collections of conceptual structures used to structure a given image. A classic example is the analysis of the noun "bachelor", presented by Charles Fillmore to explain how social and sociological frames (sets of matrices and scripts) work to shape concepts. As Fillmore explains,

> "The noun »bachelor« can be defined as an unmarried adult man, but the noun clearly exists as a motivated device for categorizing people only in the context of a human society in which certain expectations about marriage and marriageable age obtain. Male participants in modern long-term unmarried couplings would not ordinarily be described as bachelors; a boy abandoned

in the jungle and grown to maturity away from contact with human society would not be called a bachelor; John Paul II is not properly thought of as a bachelor" (Fillmore 1982: 31–59).

Thus, the notion "bachelor" functions properly solely in a culture that has the right social framework, such as the concept of monogamous marriage and the right age to get married. Therefore an eight-year-old boy will not normally be thought of as a bachelor. Naturally, the issue is much more complex. The idea, though, is to stress the cultural background of the concept "bachelor". Fillmore's model does not take into account homosexuals or Muslims who can have more than one wife. The typical age when one gets married and exceptions to the social obligation to marry (cf. Catholic priests) also vary from culture to culture.

Thus, every culture creates a framework which helps form a category of actions and attitudes relevant to a given community. The very model describing a notion, in the form of a script or a social frame, does not exhaust its significance in communication and cognition process. It cannot be treated as a definite meaningful unit, for its structure is subject to transformations which help to underline those aspects of a category that are relevant at the moment. This is why cognitivists speak of mental scenes which correspond to certain model mind images. Such a scene can be further "arranged" during conceptualisation.

One of the basic mechanisms that shape the structure of mental scene, according to Leonard Talmy, is the act of framing. In a nutshell, framing is attracting the recipient's attention to selected fragments of a scene, at the same time moving some less important fragments to the background. To show how it works, Talmy presents various ways to ask someone to bring milk from the fridge. The following description spans the full range of actions needed to fetch milk from the fridge. Figures (1), (2) and (3) mark the stages of the action forming a complete picture of the mental scene constituting the script for "fetching milk from the fridge":

[I need milk]

(1) Go, (2) take the milk out of the fridge (3) and bring it here.

However, the wording of the request need not contain all the three elements.

| | |
|---|---|
| Fetch the milk from the fridge. | (middle part framing) |
| Bring the milk here. | (end framing) |
| Go and get the milk from the fridge. | (end ellipsis) |
| Take the milk out of the fridge and bring it here. | (beginning ellipsis) |
| Go and get the milk here. | (middle part ellipsis) |
| Go, take the milk out of the fridge and bring it here. | (full framing) |

All of the commands above imply the same, complete script of actions connected with fetching the milk from the fridge. However, each of them highlights a different stage, a different fragment of the mental picture, thus partly modifying the meaning of the request. Thus, we can speak of various possibilities of shaping the mental scene by focusing the recipient's attention (framing) on certain elements or omitting them. To explain how framing and ellipsis influence the meaning of an utterance, let us imagine significant elements of the mental scene describing the action of shopping. They include: the buyer, the seller/shop assistant (for instance, a Mr Black), the commodity,

money, paying, receiving the commodity, bringing the commodity home. We can tell a spouse about our shopping in a variety of ways, using framing:

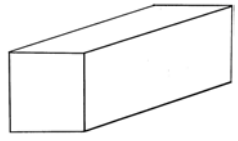
A. Look what I bought.
B. Look what I brought home.
C. Look what I got at Mr Black's.
D. Look what I spent my money on.

All of the above convey the message that shopping has been done; at the same time, each of them expresses some additional information. Sentence A makes the interlocutor interested in the shopping; B stresses the acquisition of a useful object; by underlining the location, C implies that the commodity is hard to come by in the neighbourhood; D emphasises the relation between the product's value and its price.

The suggested interpretations of the sentences above are not the only possibilities. They can help understand the role of framing in expressing various senses connected with the act of shopping, though.

## Wittgenstein – dawning of an aspect

Talmy's framing deploys a fundamental mechanism of conceptualisation – focusing on selected elements of the mental picture at the cost of others. Thus the same mental scene can give rise to many different senses. Similarly, in eye perception the same picture can be seen in different ways. This is stressed by Wittgenstein, who analyses an illustration that appears several times in a certain textbook:

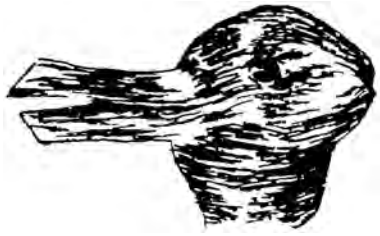


> "You could imagine the illustration [3-d box-like structure] appearing in several places in a book, a text-book for instance. In the relevant text something different is in question every time: here a glass, there an inverted open box, there a wire frame of that shape, there three boards forming a solid angle. Each time the text supplies the interpretation of the illustration. But we can also see the illustration now as another" (Wittgenstein 1968: 270).

Seeing something in a specific way is what Wittgenstein calls "dawning of an aspect". He is not interested in its psychological reasons, though. Cognitivists, on the other hand, focus on analysing mind and perception processes in order to explain this phenomenon. In the case of the illustration Wittgenstein describes, it is human ability to complete schemata with detailed picture characteristics as well as the tendency to supplement an incomplete picture with its complete image that cause the illustration to be seen in a number of ways. That is why looking at the same object we see a cube or

a solid angle. In the case of the former, what we see stands for the entire object; for the latter, what we see is what it really is.

Wittgenstein has another example of differences in perception of the same object. This time the explanation appears more complex, as there are more factors which can influence the way the recipient perceives the object. The figure is called duck-hare:



The picture shows the head of a duck or of a hare, depending on how one sees it. What factors, then, determine "how one sees it"? It seems that three significant elements that influence our interpretation of the drawing need to be pointed out. Firstly, our glance goes from left to right. When it reaches halfway through the picture, we can recognise a duck, not so much a hare. Another relevant issue is the so-called canonical arrangement, which, in this example, makes the recipient see a duck, as its head is pictured in its most common, horizontal position; if it was a hare, the head would be positioned differently, as this arrangement is rather unnatural for a hare. This makes the recipient less likely to see a hare in the picture. Finally (and usually most importantly), the context plays a role. If the head of the duck-hare animal is seen floating over the waves of a river, we are much more likely to see a duck than a hare. A body accompanying the head would of course make everything absolutely clear. Such a solution may appear trivial; however, it points to a fundamental mechanism of describing notions, namely to establishing a relation of a part to a bigger whole. A finger is seen as part of a hand, a branch forms part of a tree. If we see a broken branch that has fallen off a tree we can recognise it, but in order to define a branch one needs to refer to the idea of the tree. The case of the duck and the hare is similar. An animal's head is definable only as part of a bigger whole, in this case a living organism.

## Profile, base

Cognitive semantics has it that the meaning of an object can be determined through its relation to a particular context. As time goes by, context becomes so conventionalised it is absorbed to such an extent that objects are recognisable through their attributes. Thus, a realistic painting of a hare's head does not require a body to be recognised. However, the meaning of each concept is always determined on the basis of the context of other concepts that encompass our understanding of the world. A typical definition is, in a way, also a case of contextual completion, as it gives us some features that distinguish a given notion from other notions belonging to the same category. The kind of

conceptualisation that consists in perceiving an object in a more general context arose *per analogiam* to eye perception, where an element is seen against others.

The analogy between perception and conceptualisation was presented by Langacker with the help of the so-called "perception metaphore". The starting point here is eye perception, described as follows: subject of observation (the person who sees something), full eye span that determines the boundaries of the perceptible area, picture frames, that is to say the area which the subject of observation concentrates on, and finally the highlighted object of observation. This model of sensual experience forms the basis of mental experience, which can also be described as above. The relation between both kinds of experience is, after Langacker, synthetically described by Elżbieta Tabakowska in her introduction to cognitive linguistics. She explains that, according to Langacker:

> "the subject is the speaker or the listener. Full eye span corresponds to the complete range of possible senses an utterance contains; in other words, all its potential interpretations based on full encyclopaedic knowledge. Langacker calls this area maximum scope of semantic structure; within it there is a smaller range area that encompasses only those elements of semantic structure that are directly relevant to the characteristics of a given concept. The rest is fuzzy and barely noticeable, just like in visual perception. This reduced area, according to Langacker, is called immediate scope. Within it there is what Langacker labels profile, what our conceptualisation focuses on at a given moment" (Tabakowska 1995a: 59–61).

The model for conceptualising language expressions, as described by Langacker, is general in scope and concerns all acts of thinking, also those that have to do with reality perception.

Another advantage of Langacker's model is the possibility to distinguish between the kind of context that is associated with a concept by virtue of occasional connotations, and another kind of context, activated due to its key role in defining a concept. The latter is particularly well exemplified by the notion of hypotenuse, which, being a segment, requires a context in the form of a right-angled triangle. The triangle forms the conceptual base for the profile (the hypotenuse). Similarly, an island, a piece of land in itself, is inconceivable in isolation from the surrounding water. Thus profile can be part of base (cf. the case of hypotenuse), or only exist in relation to it (in actual fact, an island is not part of an ocean). The distinction between profile and base constitutes a fundamental relation in the description of conceptual structures. Any concept is understood by grasping the relation that links it to the context of thorough world knowledge, stored in the human mind in the form of cognitive domains: frames, scripts and images.

## Context

As in the case of meaning, cognitivists describe context within the framework of mental processes. In relation to utterance, they call it

> "the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance (apart from the premise that the utterance in question has been produced). A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the

> world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation" (Sperber, Wilson *op.cit.*: 15–16).

The above-mentioned areas of human knowledge used in interpreting events are nothing new compared to previous methodologies. However, the task that cognitivists set out to do is slightly different. Their interest is not so much in reconstructing the right interpretative context as in understanding the mechanism of its selection.

So far nobody has been able to come up with a theory that would fully explain the problem posed above, but the very awareness of the necessity to consider the mechanism that controls the application of context is a feature of cognitive methodology. Although other methodologies also display some interest in context as a meaning-creative device, in cognitive semantics context is not limited to information coming from the immediate environment and communicative actions immediately preceding a given moment. Context is here to be understood as a set of images functioning in the recipient's mind and premises necessary to interpret a particular situation. Thus, apart from incoming information, context can encompass: recipient expectations, scientific hypotheses, religion, anecdotal memory, cultural beliefs, and assumptions about the mental state of the speaker. Sperber and Wilson subdivide context into: direct, implied and encyclopaedic. They all point to different cognitive abilities of the recipient, and the differences between them can lead to multiple interpretations of the same phenomena. After all, the scope of knowledge stored in human minds varies considerably from person to person; drawing conclusions does not always proceed along the same lines, and the amount of sensual data depends on a given person's perceptiveness. There is no doubt that standards of implication, required scope of knowledge or system of values can be set; still, if recipients are supposed to react spontaneously to the input that they receive, their interpretations should be based on premises that they draw from their own experience. In order to be successful communicators, therefore, we either have to tailor our message to someone's understanding of the world, or to change that understanding itself.

Peter Stein, who worked on his version of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and made an extensive study of the Elizabethan period (Patterson 1981: 123–150), opted for the latter solution. He decided to present the results of his research in the form of a "museum of Shakespeare". It showed living pictures, processions and customs that Stein and his team collected about Shakespeare. The experience that the audience acquired through that did not make the drama's meanings explicit, but certainly served as a good background to the play. As the audience watched the exhibition their knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's times changed, which led to a change in the context in which they appreciated the action on stage.

What Stein did is actually relatively common in theatre. The programme the audience can read through before the play begins serves a similar purpose, although to a lesser extent. In materials like that the director often enumerates the sources that inspired him in his work. Thus he provides his audience with the kind of knowledge that enables them – at least partially – to see the events in the play from the same angle (or in the same context) as the artist did.

## Metonymy – general principles

Metonymy is the last significant cognitive category discussed in this chapter. In principle, cognitivism understands metonymy more or less like it is understood in the traditional approach. *Słownik terminów literackich* (*Dictionary of Literary Terms*) (1988) defines metonymy as "replacement of an object's or phenomenon's name with another". Similarly, Lakoff in *Metaphors We Live by* says that "Metonymy […] allows us to use one entity to stand for another" (Lakoff, Johnson 1988: 36). Both the quoted sources subdivide metonymy into classes that subsume individual metonymous expressions under more general categories:

PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT:
"He bought a Ford".
"I hate to read Heidegger".

CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED:
"Nixon bombed Hanoi".
"Napoleon lost at Waterloo".
(*ibidem*: 38)

CAUSE FOR RESULT:
"A bullet killed him".

SIGN FOR OBJECT:
"Defeated half-moon".
(*Słownik terminów literackich*, *op.cit.*: 308)

However, unlike in the traditional approach, cognitive semantics treats metonymy as much more than just a figure of speech. The role it plays in the process of designation was commented on by Lakoff, who speaks of "a general metonymy whereby words stand for the concepts they express" (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 108). To recapitulate – meaning is not rooted in words, but in concepts produced by the human mind. The scope of these concepts is broader than the objects designated by words. Thinking of the word "lawnmower" one conjures up not only a conceptual image of the person involved in the given activity, but also imagines an overgrown field where the lawnmower is working. The fact that words designate a broader conceptual scope is paramount also in symbolic metonymy, for example in the case of the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit.

> "this symbolism is not arbitrary. It is grounded in the conception of the dove in Western culture and the conception of the Holy spirit in Christian theology. There is a reason why the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit and not, say, the chicken, the vulture, or the ostrich. The dove is conceived of as beautiful, friendly, gentle, and, above all, peaceful. As a bird, its natural habitat is the sky, which metonymically stands for heaven, the natural habitat of the Holy Spirit. The dove is a bird that flies gracefully, glides silently, and is typically seen coming out of the sky and landing among people" (Lakoff, Johnson, *op.cit.*: 41).

Due to this extensive connotation of the word “dove”, the characteristic white bird can help people get a better grasp of the Holy Spirit, an abstract being. Thus the principle of language metonymy based on the part (designate) for whole (full conceptualisation) structure helps to root our abstract conceptual system in everyday experience.

The “part for whole” principle works in language not only in the case of a broader meaning-creative context that departs from the designate. It is also used in coining names where a single feature or attribute stand for an entire object or phenomenon. When asked what a cuckoo is one tends to describe what the bird looks like, but the name itself is indicative only of the sound it makes. Cognitivists are of the opinion that it is one of the more significant rules that shape our reasoning. They claim that the choice of the part to stand for the whole does not happen at random, but is guided by important cognitive reasons. The Polish *ścierka* (lit. dishcloth) means “a piece of usually linen or cotton cloth used for drying dishes in the kitchen” (*Słownik Języka Polskiego* 1978: 441). The name stresses the function of the object, which is quite pragmatic, but to dry the dishes one can also use a rag (Pol. *szmatka*), “a shred of cloth” (*ibidem*); there is every likelihood that whether one asks for a rag or a dishcloth, the actual object one gets will be exactly the same. This does not run counter to the fact that the concept of a dishcloth is somewhat different from that of a rag, both concepts being shaped by important cognitive reasons. What matters most in the concept “dishcloth” is what we use it for, the connotation we have when we think of a rag is little value and, consequently, no need to be very careful about it. In general one could say that a dishcloth and a rag are essentially the same objects, but when precision matters one is apt to say “please pack a few dishcloths”, as not every rag can be used to dry dishes.

It is very often for pragmatic reasons that we decide to use exact terminology, but the rationale may also be different. A highly aesthetic person might not want to think of a rag to dry dishes. The sentence “John wrapped a dishcloth round the leaking pipe” may also strike one as infelicitous (unless John actually did use a dishcloth). For political reasons we will use metonymy and say “Nixon bombed Hanoi” to stress who is responsible, even though President Nixon himself never dropped any bombs. Thus, metonymy is quite significant in language and in our conceptual system, as it helps shape the message and understanding of the world in accordance with certain pragmatic, aesthetic, syntactic or rhetorical restrictions. In this way language structures or cognitive domains are not a passive reflection of the perceived world, but a result of active mental interpretation of sensual stimuli, in the context of internal needs and the knowledge gained.

# 2. MENTAL STRUCTURES; FIGURE – BACKGROUND

## The role of cognitive domains in understanding the events on stage

The key role that cognitive domains play in gathering extralingusitic knowledge and arranging it in the human mind is confirmed by a number of linguistic, anthropological or psychological works recently written by cognitivists. A lot of language phenomena, inexplicable in classicl linguistics, can be analysed within the framework of the methodology that relates to structures describing human mental processes. Anthropology also explains various forms of cultural activity by means of shared images that appear in the minds of the individuals that form a given culture. Cognitive psychology is based on similar assumptions: "Human behaviour depends not only on incoming information from the outside world, but also on cognitive domains, that is knowledge acquired through learning and thinking, encoded in long-term memory" (Kozielecki *op.cit.*).

The three above-mentioned areas of science hold interest for theatre researchers; that is why cognitive sciences can be used in theatre research. However, whereas psychological or anthropological aspects can form an integral part of the reception of a theatrical performance, conceptualisation of meaning cannot be restricted to psychical reactions or cultural codes. That is why cognitive linguistics is such an interesting domain, providing comprehensive treatment of cognitive domains as a basis for interpersonal communication, with respect to psychology of reception and cultural aspects of language. However, the highly critical remarks about theoretical models based on quasi-linguistic models of performance reception as well as the well-known limitations to the semiotic method which strives to describe theatre language, cause misgivings about another attempt to ally linguistics with theatrology. Therefore using cognitive domains in the analysis of the process of performance reception in the theatre merits a few words of explanation.

Firstly, even if cognitive domains are independent meaning units, they are neither clearly determined nor unchangeable, unlike in the classical theory of sign. In cognitivism, these domains are structured by the recipient, in accordance with a number of contextual factors. As a consequence, cognitivism dismisses the existence of elementary units, which formed a basic concept in traditional semiotics. This rule was in line with linguistic assumptions, which held that "any semiotic study *sensu stricto* consists in identifying units, describing their distinctive features and working towards more and more exact markers of distinctiveness" (Benveniste 1977: 33).

Secondly, the interest in meaning interpretation does not limit a theatrical performance to a mere act of communication, decoding which means nothing more than identifying meaning units. Identifying individual cognitive domains that the audience develop whilst watching the play, merely establishes a background for further study of the comprehension process which comprises the remaining aspects of mental activity. The final structure of cognitive domains depends also on individual factors of perception, such as perceptiveness, mental state, ideological and aesthetic assumptions.

Finally, let us explain to what extent and in what way cognitive methods of structure analysis can be used to describe the reception of a theatrical performance. The simple relations that hold between the body which profiles the head of, receptively, a duck or a hare, (cf. Wittgenstein's example) appear too trivial to be applied to the complex images of a theatrical performance. On the other hand, the impressive range of cognitive domains representing language forms seems to be too detailed for a theatre play.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on one of the paramount relations which shape our cognition process, viz. the background – figure relation. The reason why that particular structure has been selected is threefold:

A. The background – figure relation actually lies at the bottom of most cognitive domains, manifesting itself as the distinction into marked and other elements of a concept.

B. It fits within the framework of perception metaphor – a construct clearly applicable in the theatre context – linking individual aspects of visual perception with relevant aspects of conceptualisation. In this case, "figure" stands for a highlighted visible object. Mentally, it corresponds to the subject of conceptualisation, or what conceptualisation focuses on at a given moment. "Background", in turn, covers a wider attention span and the corresponding semantic structure scope comprising elements directly relevant in characterising a given concept.

C. The relation helps seek analogy between the mental picture and acts of ostension, which, according to prior assumptions, constitute one of the main aspects of theatre as art.

## Metonymy as a fundamental rule of mental representation

In cognitivism metonymy describes the relation between perception data and resulting mental images. Perceived images, often fragmented, lead to the audience developing more complex images in their minds; these are necessary to adequately interpret what we perceive through our senses. The principle is well-known among theatrical directors; in line with it, in some *mise en scènes* the set and the acting only suggest possible interpretations. A very typical example of metonymy in theatre can be found in Jerzy Grzegorzewski's version of *The Threepenny Opera*, where London as the setting was represented by a small model of Tower Bridge. The protagonist, Mac the Knife, can be found squeezed between the spans of the small bridge, whereas according to the plot he should be in prison. To stress that fact, Grzegorzewski uses metonymy again, by putting bars into the prompt box facing the audience. Kate and Polly who come to see Macheath in prison talk to him through these very bars. Thus the audience can conjure up two superimposed images (London and the prison), thanks to the use of metonymy. Paradoxically, the convict's prison cell was in fact the whole of London, whereas the women who were not imprisoned were crammed into the tiny prompter's box.

Things become more complex with abstract images, which form an inherent part of any performance. We tend to refer to the basic sense of the events shown on stage using such notions as hate, conflict, recognition, expulsion, etc. Though some of them

manifest themselves in real actions, it is difficult to show the meaning of these notions leaving no room for multiple interpretations. How to show the ultimate union of two lovers? If it happens to be a happy end of an adventurous love story, the protagonists are quite likely to be pictured kissing each other. In a tragedy, the audience may see a grave shared by the two lovers. In a Catholic wedding ceremony the unity is symbolised by tying the newlyweds' hands with a stole. In any case, the given action shows the ultimate unity of two people only partially. Each solution also highlights a different aspect of the union. A kiss signifies passion, the tying of the hands stresses the indissolubility of the marriage, whereas the shared grave implies eternal unification.

Images that the audience generate in their minds are thus more than a simple reflection of what they can see on stage. Metonymy prompts imagination, which completes and gives meaning to what is being seen. Naturally, there are performances so mimetic in their character that the audience can hardly activate their imagination in this way. Contemporary theatre, though, is more inclined toward suggesting meaning, and metonymy, being the basis of cognition, makes it possible. It is through active completion of images that the audience take part in creating meanings suggested by the *mise en scène*. Their images become more personal, unlike those imposed by the staging, where even the tiniest details of pictures and actions have been designed. Metonymy also enables pictures to be superimposed, whereas in an actual theatrical performance this is implausible. *Mise en scène* does not only passively suggest images, because images are dependent on how they are suggested. Metonymy is about selecting a fragment of the complete image to be pictured on stage. The action of tying hands during a wedding ceremony brings to mind a different image of a relationship than the picture of two lovers kissing.

## Profile – base relation

The audience's active role in creating meanings is not restricted solely to completing fragments of images shown on stage, but also lies in establishing relations between selected elements of the staging. One of the main meaning-creative operations that the audience are involved in is determining which elements of *mise en scène* constitute profile (subject of cognition) and which constitute its base (the immediate context needed to define the subject of cognition). The audience establish that relation on the basis of incoming information from the stage, but the very division into profile and base is a conceptual one, and as such cannot be found in acting and stage events. It is also essential that occasional context (which adds secondary shades of meaning, usually emotive meaning) be distinguished from the kind of context which forms the base of a concept. When a devil's figure is illuminated in red, the intention is to create the atmosphere of terror (or its ironical opposite). The red light, though, is not contextually sufficient to understand the concept of devil; what is needed is the metaphysical structure of the world of gods, angels and creatures from hell.

Whether the profile – base structure that shapes the meaning of a selected fragment of *mise en scène* is generated by the audience's collective mind, depends on staging arrangements and on the audience themselves – their knowledge, way of thinking, and

attitude. A good example which shows how the relation in question is formed is the scene from Shakespeare's *King Lear* where the kingdom is divided. The text itself does not suggest a clear enough interpretation; this is pointed out by Jan Kott, who stresses the weak points of the exposition,

> "astonishing in its bareness, sketching of conflict, gradation. King Lear's exposition is ridiculous, if one is to seek at least some psychological likelihood in it: a grand and formidable ruler holds a speech contest among his three daughters who are to voice their love to their father; the results of the contest are decisive in the country's division. Lear sees no evil and hears no evil; Regan and Goneril's hypocrisy are apparent. As a character, Lear is ludicrous, naive and silly. When he goes mad, he evokes sympathy, but hardly compassion and fear" (Kott *op.cit.*: 66).

A director who subscribes to this opinion is facing a daunting task: his *mise en scène* should not display the weaknesses in exposition that Kott exposes.

Giorgio Strehler's staging attempts to add a tragic dimension to Lear's fate. As he was looking for a more convincing rationale of the king's behaviour during the ceremony of dividing the land among his daughters, Strehler moved the daughters' hypocrisy to the background, opting for highlighting the conflict between the king's dying generation and the youth who yearn for power. Strehler describes the nature of this particular generation gap:

> "The old generation consists of Lear, Gloucester and Kent. Old Man, tenant to Gloucester, makes a brief appearance, too. There are very few representatives of the older generation and a lot of the young and greedy ones. It seems to me that this balance is paramount, regardless of whether we achieve it through »naturalness« or through »convention«. What matters is that amongst the agile, cruel and greedy animals who »happen to live at a later date«, both the old men look like two mammoths. Their moves are slow, as if numbed. It's a daunting vision, this defenceless old generation shuffling along in mud. The youth around them are clawing their way and burning out in hot and cool passions" (Strehler *op.cit.*: 284).

Strehler's comments stem from his knowledge of the complete text, but in order for the audience to appreciate the play, the generation gap should manifest itself at the very beginning, in the exposition. This is how Strehler imagines the opening scene of the tragedy on stage:

> "Lear puts on his cloak. Light goes on – and here we see »King Lear's court«. An almost pathetic impression. The King sits in the middle, his crown on his head, wearing a long, dark-red cloak with folds going behind his back. There are others on his side, also wearing crowns, headbands or gilded noblemen's rings. They are all young, long-haired, with magnificent beards, striking casual poses, their hair extravagantly coiffured. The men are clad in dark, almost shiny clothes, tight-fitting sleeveless doublets and boots; the women are wearing coats and scarves with patterns painted on them. Next to the old, white-faced and wrinkled king there is another old man with fair eyes and an almost ridiculous air. A third old man stands opposite them. There is nobody else. A feeling of isolation and loneliness of the old. A feeling of temporariness and falsity of the court" (*ibidem*: 296–297).

Strehler's intended division of the characters into old and young renders multiple interpretations. The very division into two opposing groups does not completely determine which element of the resulting arrangement the recipients' conceptualisation should focus on. In our example there are three possible choices of the highlighted element constituting – along with the other elements – the profile of the cognitive domain:

– Focusing on Lear's behaviour we see the old, anachronistic king's isolation.

– Shifting attention to the young we see their greed.

– We can also highlight the very relation that pinpoints the conflict and the generation change in particular.

Strehler's remarks suggest that he opted for the third possibility, which focuses on the change itself and its consequences. It is worth noting, though, that unless the audience see the king's out-of-date behaviour and the young's greed, they won't be able to conceptualise the generation gap. Thus in the example under analysis here, the change constitutes the profile, whereas the base, the necessary counterpart, is Lear's anachronistic behaviour and the greed of the young. In the first and the second options the two elements of the structure also condition each other. Lear's failure to comprehend contemporary reality is shown in his idea to underline his power through an impotent rite. In the new world what matters is strength and determination, symbolised by the tight-fitting doublets showing the characters' muscles and their nonchalant poses, indicative of lack of respect toward tradition. Lear's obsolete attitude can only be seen through the young's negligent and greedy behaviour, determining the then-current reality.

A comparison of Strehler's interpretation of Shakespeare's play and his pre-staging assumptions reveals predictable correspondence. However, this alone does not guarantee that the audience will arrive at identical interpretations just watching the particular performance. My students, who saw it in class, were rarely able to appreciate Strehler's intended division, even if they had read his comments beforehand. To a certain extent, this may have been attributable to the fact that, for technical reasons, the video version they saw slightly blurred the visual differences between both groups of characters. It is not so much the question of the extent to which the *mise en scène* achieved its intended purpose, but rather which factors influence its interpretation. Watching the play on a TV screen should therefore be treated as watching it under special conditions. In their comments, my students paid particular attention to the relations holding between the threesome: Lear, Cordelia and their sisters. The other members of the court were thought of as merely context accompanying the events taking place between the three characters in question. Thus, the court only served as a background for the events of the play; although physically observable, it played no significant role in understanding the conflicts and behaviour of the four protagonists. In their interpretations students tended to juxtapose Cordelia's honesty and Regan and Goneril's mendacity.

The rationale for this interpretation of events is multifaceted, to say the least. It seems that the dichotomy of one good daughter vs. several bad ones, a model that fables often deploy, is firmly rooted in our literary imagination; if so, then it is more likely to be referred to in the context of a theoretical performance than any other structure – here the generation gap. What is more, the princes' costumes were patterned after Italian young fashion from the 1960's, which an average Pole finds almost as exotic as Lear's costume. Thus the intended contrast between the youth wearing fashionable clothes and Lear's retinue in their démodé attires became fuzzy. Another reason has to do with the *mise en scène* itself. A female student comments: "The girl (Cordelia) says she is truthful to her father. Unlike her sisters' coiffured, fair hair (one white-haired, the other red-haired), hers is long, straight, natural". Stressing the contrast between Lear's daughters does not leave out the king himself. Their honesty or dishonesty are feelings they harbour for their father, who automatically becomes

a necessary component of meaning as a whole or, in Langacker's terminology, the concept's base.

As they were analysing the play's opening scene, my students also paid attention to the scene where Cordelia leaves the court's area, marked with a transparent curtain, and demonstratively sheds her royal cloak. They interpreted that gesture as a clear symbol of mutiny against the court's falsity. Strehler understands Cordelia's behaviour similarly, but he does not see the rebellion in such a positive light as the students do. In her dissociation from the court's untruthfulness, Cordelia goes against a certain fixed order, which, naturally, evokes the king's rage. He sees the rite not as a test of love, but a ceremony confirming his power as the Lord's Annointed through his daughters' adulatory addresses. However, the students did not see this hidden meaning, not infrequently failing to even accept the interpretation.

The reasons why students' interpretations differ from Strehler's are explicable only by analysing the profile-base structure, which profiles the meaning of Cordelia's action in relation to the complete exposition. The gesture itself (profile) has to be interpreted in the context of the events preceding it (in other words, its base). Mutiny, by definition, is directed against something. Thus my students' interpretation stemmed not from their difficulties to recognise the characteristics of Cornelia's behaviour, but rather from their subjective attitude to the ceremony itself. An experiment among the students showed that the subjects who disapproved of the rite itself were more reserved toward Strehler's claim that Lear sees his youngest daughter's action as sacrilegious. It is not sacrilege to go against principles established through tradition we do not approve of. Speaking of that, it is worth noting that this instance proves that the meaning of a gesture determines the attitude the recipient has toward the context that profiles the meaning of the main gesture. Thus validation becomes a meaning-creative part of cognitive domain.

In his staging, Strehler attempted to make the audience feel at loath about Cordelia by his choice of music accompanying the events. He wanted the beginning to appear solemn.

> "A choir that is almost church-like, a fairly »archaic« modulation of the feudal rite, in line with Shakespeare's text, the verbal formula of declaring children's love for parents. This ritual »atmosphere« eventually leads to verbal and sonic disorder. Upsetting the order leads to cool, mathematical disorder" (*ibidem*: 305).

Thus the music was intended to stress the significance of Cornelia's action that upset the "sacred" order. In the video version the choir's singing stopped as Cornelia started protesting; the above-mentioned disorder was not there. However, Cornelia's behaviour cannot be assessed in universal terms; it depends on the recipient's attitude to the singing which precedes the disobedient daughter's address. The music, which Strehler thought would create a solemn mood, was often interpreted as merely another element of the anachronistic rite. Some students even used the expression "church singing", in a negative sense of the word.

This comparison of multiple interpretations of the same scene shows how a different arrangement of the same set of elements leads to a change in meaning of the events. This applies both to the paradigmatic aspect of the picture, for example the dichotomy of the young and the old, and to the relations which link the subsequent parts of the play, that is to say its syntagmatic dimension. Normally, a gesture of protest refers to

the events or situation preceding it. The meaning of a given fragment of the performance depends on which elements are considered to be profile and which its base. However, it is not an independent and unrestrained decision of the audience who rely on their subjective beliefs and attitudes. It is also perception itself, as well as acts of ostension attracting the audience's attention to certain objects and actions, that influence which element or relation will be singled out.

## Profile and profiling

The profile – base relation, which determines the meaning of concepts, is generated by the human mind in the process of highlighting certain elements of the mental picture against others. To analyse the mental representation of observed events, two-element structures are not sufficient, though. In its construction of the mental picture of the world, the human mind deploys also abstract categories. Once they are determined, a schematic cognitive pattern is developed that classifies a given phenomenon as process, object, quality or state. In natural language these structures have the form of grammatical categories. Thus, via an analysis of linguistic expressions, one can reach an understanding of how the audience interpret selected fragments of a performance. For example, members of the audience use short expressions to describe what they see on stage: escape (noun derived from verb – process), terrifying storm (noun + adjective – state, character of the scene), middle-class living room (nominal expression – object, place).

In Langacker's terminology, the process of forming particular cognitive categories is called profiling. Thus, an expression, an external stimulus, profiles a given cognitive category that represents a relevant grammatical category. In theatre the process is quite similar, but it is the context of the events shown on stage that determines the form of a cognitive category. Here conventions determining whether the actions of a character take the plot forward or merely present certain qualities are hard to find. The very arrangement of elements on stage – theatrical and "mental" – does not ultimately determine conceptualisation. In his example, Langacker analyses two expressions with different meanings, which are based on the same integration of elements of a mental scene – a football lying under a table (Langacker 1987: 289–290):

That football under the table. (profile football)
That football is under the table. (profile relation – under the table)

Both sentences bring to mind the same general picture (a football under a table), whereas the difference in meaning arises as a consequence of language profiling, that is marking certain structures of the picture.

In theatre, things work in a similar way. When we see an actor standing on a table it is our decision whether we interpret it as pinpointing a character, highlighting them ("look at the one on the table") or stressing the relation (somebody on a table), leading to interpretative conclusions: ill-mannered, the head of the family, etc. Theatre does not have such a strongly conventional system as language and, as we have already indi-

cated, is more dependent on elements outside *mise en scène*. Let us name but two that are of prime importance to theatre:

1. cultural context,

2. an interpretative hypothesis formulated in relation to a larger fragment of the plot that determines the reception of particular scenes.

The role of the story presented on stage remains central to the arrangement of events. Whether the audience have read the text of the play or not, they themselves arrange the sequence of events in certain conventionalised plot patterns. Thus they enrich *mise en scène* with additional meanings related to the pattern or interpretation of the pre-read play.

Cultural differences are also very important in appreciating contemporary theatre, which often purports to be universal art. Unlike in the case of literary works, which need to be translated, theatrical performances are frequently shown in the original, regardless of the target culture. There are, however, limits to universalism in theatre, as interpretation of acting tends to vary from culture to culture.

The findings of Peter Brook's research into the language of theatre as a universal code appear to be very interesting. John Heilpern, who accompanied Brook in his experimental trip to Africa, comments that "an European actor leaning forward to show an old man can be interpreted in Africa as doing some kind of physical exercise" (Heilpern 1978: 109). In line with the old joke about a doctor asking a hunchback why he is creeping like that, one can imagine that an African audience, seeing Molière's Miser, hunched and moving sideways, can see him as a clever thief attempting to snatch another character's moneybag. In that particular case the interpretation is not altogether wrong, in fact, but it does change the meaning of the acting considerably: in lieu of character (adjective) we get action (verb).

Actually Peter Brook experienced something very much like that himself. In his search of a language of theatre that would be shared by different cultures, he prepared a simple scene to act out with his troupe. The scene's central element was a pair of boots. It started with an actor putting a pair of boots somewhere, walking away from it, then going back to them, putting them on and beginning a stroll… Brook and his crew could not understand why that particular scene aroused genuine interest and appreciation in one village and in another the reception was at best perfunctory, clearly with precious little understanding on the part of the audience.

Brook himself was of the opinion that his troupe based his improvisation on symbols and elements very typical of European culture, but hardly known to African villagers (*ibidem*: 109). What his multinational team have to say about it sheds some more light on the nature of the difference in interpreting the same action by different audiences. Heilpern describes how Katsulas places his big army boots in the middle of the stage, capturing the audience's attention, then approaches it, expressing great joy at having found a pair of boots in the middle of a desert; he then puts them on, feeling just great, strutting around the carpet like a newly born man (*ibidem*: 98). Yoshi Oida, in turn, comments that:

> "in Africa, just as in Japan, boots represent wealth, culture and status. From then on, a point of contact – an understanding – existed between our audience and us, and we were able to begin improvising. Someone put the boots on, then walked to and fro, displaying their immense power and wealth. People immediately understood, and loved what was going on' (*Peter Brook and the Mahabharata* 1991: 110).

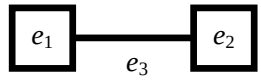
It is clear that the same actions were interpreted quite differently. Heilpern describes how the boots were found (action), whereas his Japanese colleague, who treats boots as a certain symbol, focuses on personal features (character). The difference in the function of boots in both cultures in question resulted in profiling different cognitive categories; thus, Katsulas' improvisation is understood, in the first case, as action or, in the other, as "presentation of quality". After all, it does make a difference whether we perceive a performance as an adventure story or as a presentation of a character.

* * *

When one looks into *mise en scène* that are more complex than a simple improvisation, one notices a much greater complexity of cognitive domains forming concepts. Multiplying cognitive categories determining the character of actions, though, would result in an endless array of mental structures. Critical approaches, reduced to describing a limited set of elements typical for a given *mise en scène*, require a detailed analysis of cognitive domains necessary to comprehend a performance. In the theory of theatre, though, it is more important to establish general relations between a variety of contexts and the process of bringing out elements in a cognitive domain (a mental representation of stage events and actions), which would hold regardless of the level of generalisation.

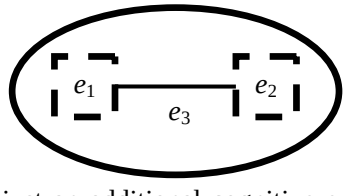
Let us refer back to Langacker's example (Langacker 1987: 214–216) to introduce the cognitive method of symbolic description of semantic phenomena, which is necessary to further our discussion on profiling cognitive domains in the reception of a theatrical performance. Langacker stresses the difference in profiling the conceptual structure by two different expressions, exemplifying it by the words [GROUP] and [NEAR]:

[NEAR] profiles a relation:




In the diagram above, *e* stands for a single cognitive event, for example profiling a region in mental space, or establishing a relation. The thick line (*e*3) symbolises the relation of closeness (near). The squares (*e*1 and *e*2), as elements of the relation (*e*3) brought out in the conceptual structure of the expression [NEAR], have been marked in thick line too. A relation is therefore an independent cognitive event, as it is always accompanied by its counterparts.

[GROUP] is the basis for a nominal structure:




Here the relation (*e*3) is just an additional cognitive event, linking *e*1 and *e*2 that constitute the region for the notion [GROUP] (the thick elliptical line). The relations

that hold between individual elements in this case are not as significant as the basic cognitive event, that is singling the group out of the other elements.

Thus, when the audience see a group of actors on stage, they are involved in a cognitive activity, as they have to decide whether to treat the characters on stage as [GROUP] or to highlight their spatial relations in that they are "next to each other" [NEAR]. The system of theatrical conventions does not allow for such distinctions. Therefore what frequently matters most is the interpretative hypothesis that stems from prior assumptions as to the general character of the *mise en scène* or from prior knowledge of the plot.

To decide how to label the group of characters on stage, let us analyse four expressions that critics sometimes use to describe actual performances:

– CROWD,
– GROUP,
– GROMADA,
– PROPER NAME (e.g. PEASANTS).

Each of these refer to a particular gathering of characters on stage. Thus all the four expressions carry the same basic conceptual value. It has the form of a set of elements that create a fuzzy whole:

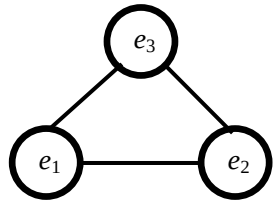



Figure 1

(In Langacker's notation which we have adopted in this dissertation, circles represent objects, whereas squares may represent objects or relations)

At this stage of our analysis the human gathering on stage is a homogeneous mass[*] (Langacker 1991: 71) in the form of a number of characters that form a whole only because of their topographic proximity. This kind of conceptualisation is called unbounded region of conceptual structure[**]. The audience can provide the contour themselves, though. By widening the scope of conceptual structure one can determine the contour of an area within our interest against the background. Langacker describes looking at a red circle on a white wall in close-up; as a result, one can only see a shapeless red mass. To see the shape one has to walk away from the wall far enough for our eye span to cover also the white background against which the red circle is painted (*ibidem*: 65). Contour in cognitivism is not limited to the lines delineating the space an object occupies. It can also be imposed on an area by highlighting the relation that links individual elements. This is what happens in the case of the expression "team", whose members are seen as an entity, as they cooperate to achieve a goal together. This is called "internal contouring", as opposed to external contouring (cf. the red circle).

[*] Homogeneity constitutes a distinctive feature of mass nouns, according to Langacker.
[**] Cf. Tabakowska (1995a), the concepts *las* (forest) and *piasek* (sand).

One expression, viz. CROWD, appears to be of particular interest; it is also quite problematic to interpret in the given context. In Leon Schiller's staging *of Nie-Boska komedia* (*Non-Divine comedy*) (Zawistowski 1927: 50), there is a scene with mutinous masses in the third act. Władysław Zawistowski, in his comments, uses such expressions as "the crowd acts as a single mass", "individuals form part of a mass", which seems to imply that the region of conceptual structure that corresponds to the picture on stage is unbounded. Thus the shape of the crowd becomes irrelevant; so do the relations which hold among its members. Other fragments of the text, though, reveal some characteristics of the crowd, such as "vitality", "harmony", "anonymity", "threat it poses for noblemen and merchants" (*ibidem*: 51); these are specifically underlined by the critic. One can thus venture to say that in Schiller's staging CROWD functioned (at least in Zawistowski's perspective) as an area profiled in the so-called quality space (Langacker 1991: 73–74). Thus, the area's contour would be determined by the intensity of the individual features attributable to the crowd.

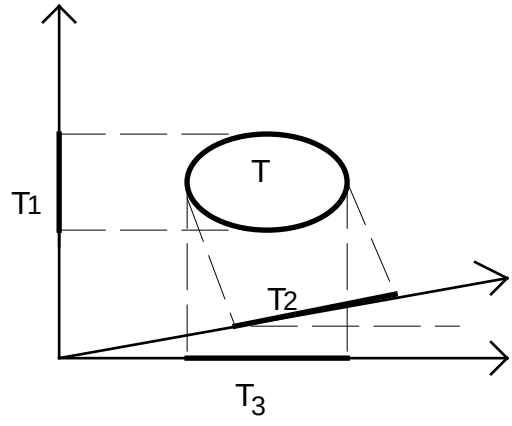



Figure 2

*T*1 – vitality of the crowd
*T*2 – harmony, homogeneity
*T*3 – threat
*T* – profiled area at the crossing of quality spaces, marked in thick line.

This perception of CROWD seems to be in line with the expressive character of Schiller's staging. CROWD is not an "object", nor is it a group of people linked by particular relations.

Contouring of a different kind is observable in Joanna Walaszek's description of Swinarski's version of *Forefathers' Eve*. The expression that she uses to call the participants in the forefathers' rite, namely *GROMADA*, gives rise to a conceptual structure bounded by the relation of co-operation that marks the *GROMADA's* unity. It is manifested by the *GROMADA's* reaction to events: "*GROMADA* disapproves of the girl's gesture". The community is weakened when the rite's observers are not unanimous in their actions: "The ghost of the girl causes repulsion with some of the women, sympathy with others. As to the boys, they are excited". Certain events, though, enable the participants to reunite: "The gromada is most firmly united in hatred toward the Ghost of the Evil Master" (Walaszek *op.cit.*: 192).

The area of the semantic structure that corresponds to Walaszek's expression *GROMADA*, is bounded just like in the case of the word "team". The only difference is that the *GROMADA's* shared objective should be interpreted along emotional rather than pragmatic lines (compassion, hatred, fear, not – for example – winning a match). An individual joins a community if their attitude to relevant events is in line with that of the *GROMADA's* other members. The concept under analysis here can be demonstrated as follows:

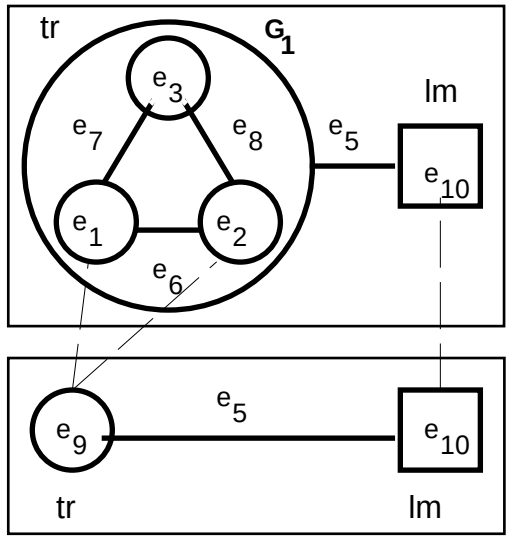
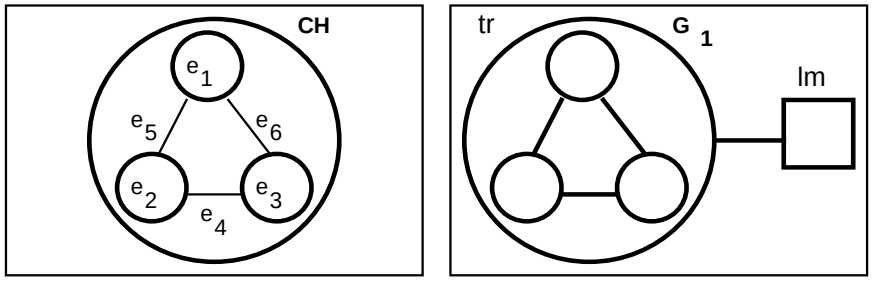



Figure 3

The figure shows how relation *e*5 that represents the attitude of character *e*9 to events *e*10 contours and delineates the area of *GROMADA* [*G*1]. In other words, characters *e*1, *e*2 and *e*3 belong in the area [*G*1] only because if they are placed under *e*9, their reaction to event *e*10 can be described using relation *e*5. If *e*10 stands for the appearance of the Evil Master's ghost, relation *e*5 refers to hatred that the members of the crew display.

The rural *GROMADA* seen as a community united through common reactions is in contrast to a later scene, namely *Great Improvisation*, where "there are PEASANTS on stage, the same individuals who took part in the rite". They are the same individuals, but no longer a *GROMADA*, just PEASANTS, who 'are sleeping, eating, drinking, quite indifferent to Konrad's ordeal" (*ibidem*: 201). The fact that the PEASANTS are indifferent to what is going on around them is again in contrast to the *GROMADA's* vivid reactions. The internal links which used to unite the members of the rite are broken. The plural (PEASANTS) makes it possible to conceptualise individual characters as performing certain actions separately from the others. Some are sleeping, others eating, still others drinking. The plural is less likely in the case of *GROMADA* which, as a mass noun, can take singular verbs. This stresses the unity of all the *GROMADA's* members.

Figure 4 shows the difference between the cognitive domains for *GROMADA* and PEASANTS:




PEASANTS *GROMADA*

Figure 4

(Elements in the GROMADA diagram are not labelled for purely technical reasons, to reduce the number of indices ascribed to the letter *e*).

The thin lines $e_4$, $e_5$, $e_6$ that link the individual units $e_1$, $e_2$, $e_3$ signify that the relations that obtain between them are irrelevant. The absence of relation linking region *CH* with any other cognitive unit is due to internal contouring of the area corresponding to the expression [PEASANTS]. Thus, the factor that determines whether an individual falls under the category PEASANTS is, in Swinarski's version, mostly their costume.

Thus, PEASANTS are shown as similar, but unrelated individuals. Konrad fails in his "quest to liberate the nation from slavery and suffering" (*ibidem*: 201). The *GROMADA*, as a co-operating community, was able to protect its independence. The PEASANTS, in turn, as a random collection of individuals, are not interested in unity; they just "sleep, eat and drink". In this way the *GROMADA's* fight for unity, its active attitude, was juxtaposed with the divisible community of PEASANTS whose sole interest lies in satisfying their individual needs.

In *The Senator's Ball*, the scene that falls immediately after *Great Improvisation*, social unity is shown in the context of Polish struggle for independence. The guests that come for the ball can be divided into two GROUPS: patriots and aristocracy, who sympathise with the occupant. In terms of ideology, which group an individual belongs to is dependent on their attitude to "the national issue". Just like in the case of *GROMADA*, belonging to the patriots' GROUP entails sharing the common goal, that is regaining independence. However, the *mise en scène* reveals some differences. The *GROMADA's* unity manifested itself in action and reactions to events, whereas in the scene under analysis here it is the costume and the code of behaviour that is decisive in classifying an individual as a member of a given GROUP. Female patriots wear black, Grottger-like dresses, whereas the Ladies' height of fashion is a "dandy" (*ibidem*: 206) dress. The GROUP, though, does not constitute a random collection (like the PEASANTS, whose only distinctive feature was their characteristic costume). It is clearly shaped not only by the physical likeness of its members, but also by the relation of contrast between "patriots" and "collaborators". This is related to Langacker's example of the red circle against a white background (see earlier). Let us picture a few women dressed in black standing next to one another in a huge crowd. Looking at them at close quarters we see a group of people clad in black; from afar, they form a clearly con-

toured group of women wearing black clothes against the whole crowd. The same happens in *The Senator's Ball*, although the GROUP is not bounded by means of their relation to the surrounding crowd, but rather to another GROUP:

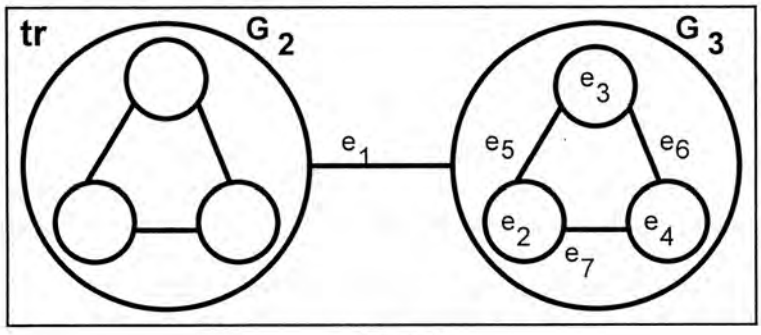



Figure 5

When comparing the above with the diagram for the concept *GROMADA* (fig. 3) one can spot two significant differences:

1. Region $G_2$ is bounded in relation to region $G_3$, and relation $e_1$ determines the contrasts between GROUPS. In the case of the *GROMADA* (fig. 3) region $G_1$ is bounded in relation to a unit symbolising an event $e_{10}$ (e.g. the appearance of the Ghost of the Evil Master). Relation $e_5$ is shown on stage through the actions of the *GROMADA*.

2. In the diagram the *GROMADA* is marked as a figure (labelled as *tr*) in relation to event $e_2$ that forms the background (labelled *lm*). In GROUP, the concept under analysis here, both elements of relation $e_1$ mark the shared region $G_2G_3$, which in total forms figure [*tr*].

The differences between both diagrams are clearly exemplified by Langacker* (Langacker 1991: 76):

"*A* is parallel to *B*" (A – figure [*tr*], B – [*lm*]),

"*A* and *B* are parallel" (in this case [*AB*] mark a shared region constituting figure [*tr*]).

What Joanna Walaszek says serves as a rationale for combining areas [$G_2$] and [$G_3$]: "Each of the groups demonstrate their superiority", "Both groups are clearly divided" (Walaszek 1991: 206). It is apparent that the subjects "each of the groups" and "both groups" mark a shared region [$W_1W_2$] that comprises both areas of the opposed camps. (The expression "are clearly divided" refers to the relation that holds within region [$G_2G_3$], previously delineated by the collective subject ("both groups"). The perception of this scene that shows in these utterances is not accidental. The fragment of *Forefathers' Eve* under analysis here does not glorify patriotism, nor does it condemn lack of patriotism. *The Senator's Ball* fully portraits the enslaved and languid Polish society and attempts to diagnose this state of affairs. Suddenly "the Master of Ceremony […] groups (emphasis mine) everyone in the middle of the stage" (*ibidem*) Walaszek points out that this very situation is where the division into collaborators and

* Langacker's notations *tr* for figure and *lm* for background serve a detailed description of the figure – background relation, which is outside our interest here.

patriots ceases, and "the confusion induced by the master of ceremony, […] gives rise to a metamorphosis of people and social relations" (*ibidem*: 207).

## Conclusions

It may seem that analysing cognitive domains as mental representations of stage events means dissecting a performance into definable meaning units. It is not the case, though. For cognitivists cognitive domains do not form semantic units but rather matrices which enable the audience to arrange incoming information and stimuli into meaningful entities. The basic meaning-creative operation that this chapter has discussed is profiling, or "selecting particular semantic structures by singling them out of the so-called semantic base. In the case of natural languages, the base is the whole conceptual value of a given expression" (Tabakowska 1996: 169). In a theatrical performance the base is the mental image that is generated while watching stage events. It is either a mirror image of what is being seen, or – in line with the principle of metonymy – an expansion of it. However, to determine the essence of events shown on stage this basic level of cognitive activity does not suffice. In the opening scene of Strehler's version of *King Lear* the protagonist is recognisable by, for instance, his regalia, his daughters can be spotted out in the crowd too, and in general the whole is definable as a royal ceremony. The division into the young and the old can be seen, too. These pictures make up the mental image of the scene, but do not explain the essence of the events that take place. It is only highlighting an element that profiles the complete mental image that constitutes a cognitive operation which determines the interpretation of events. As we saw earlier, the individual interpretations of Strehler's version of *King Lear*'s opening scene depended on which interpersonal relation profiled the scene: that between the King and his daughters (his blindness to their lies), between Cordelia and her sisters (the contrast between the good and the bad), etc. In case of multiple interpretations of a scene, selecting one of them must entail specifying the premises that influenced the choice.

It is therefore essential that the mechanism that guides the audience's choices be specified. Cognitivists claim that context, understood as a collection of beliefs and images that the audience activate to interpret a phenomenon, plays a great role here. If the audience are particularly sensitive to visual stimuli, they are apt to concentrate on the difference in appearance between Cordelia and her sisters. If one is familiar with the plot one will focus on the protagonist, that is the king (a person who does not know the play or the title will be hard put to pinpoint the protagonist solely on the basis of what they see in the opening scene). Contemporary world experience is a significant context as well. The costumes supposed to symbolise the vivacity and youth of some characters in Strehler's version will be interpreted quite differently if the play is seen years from now. A future audience should be able to recognise Italian fashion from the 1960's, but their feelings will be a far cry from that of the contemporary audience, who may know the style from first hand experience. Thus the relation between the young and the old becomes less relevant for the recipient, who does not identify him- or her-

self with the young who rebel against obsolete forms. Therefore, by developing an attitude to fictitious reality one can assess the events that one sees on stage as well as generate a cognitive domain. By failing to accept the church-related rite Cordelia becomes less spectacular in her mutiny, as in this context her negative reaction appears quite natural. Thus, the strength with which individual contexts influence the recipient determines the shape of the mental structure and, consequently, plays a significant role in comprehending events shown on stage. The abstract character of the relations that determine cognitive domains, in turn, provides a common background for the cooperation of various contexts which shape our understanding of events: perception data, knowledge stored in our memory or psychical reactions.

Cognitive domains also delineate the area where different semiotics systems cooperate. The fact that patriots and collaborators are grouped in the centre of the stage is aligned with Wysocki's monologue about the character of Polish people delivered at that very moment. Thus, characters' movement adds to the text's image of the nation as a collection of people with good and bad traits of character, at the same time undermining the division into real Poles and Traitors. However, mental images directed by various semiotic systems do not have to be consistent with each other. The meaning of *Great Improvisation* in Swinarski's version is based on the discrepancy between what Konrad says about uniting the nation through action and the picture of the indifferent peasants sitting on the edge of the dais. Also, analysing cognitive domains makes it possible to compare images of society shown in further scenes of the play. The crew, who become unified in action, manifest a different sense of belonging to a community than the patriots, marked by their costumes. A third significant advantage of appreciating cognitive domains that lie at the bottom of comprehending actions on stage is the possibility to describe interactions that hold between individual systems. In Strehler's pre-staging assumptions the word "nothing" that Cordelia says was supposed to lead to disharmony in the music that accompanied the rite. The possibility to link two different semiotic systems stems here from the fact that cognitive domains are schematised and thus can combine two actions belonging to two different semiotic systems (language and music) into one "action leading to confusion". To clarify – the common ground for both these actions is not the language expression ("confusion"), but the mental process in which the feeling of order becomes the feeling of confusion.

Cognitive semantics, though, does not dismiss the necessity to distinguish between semiotic systems. The analysed area of mental structures helps describe meaningful units as elements that transgress semiotic systems and cognitive contexts. To show a speaker one has to combine the specific way in which a language utterance is formed, the characteristic gestures, and finally the image of a human being itself. As it is, mental representation of the world around us is not a selection of divisible elements, but a network of many semiotic systems. Theatre, by creating fictitious reality, refers to processes and cognitive domains that "represent" the "real world", being its reflection only in that sense of the word. However, this reflection is structured with respect to the additional context of theatrical conventions, and the very process of comprehension is geared toward somewhat different aims than those set by the pragmatism of everyday life. Watching a performance we attempt to comprehend the events not so much because of life's necessities, but rather as a reflection of certain aesthetic values.

## 3. A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING CONCEPTUALISATION IN THE RECEPTION OF A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE – AN APPROXIMATION

If cognitive domains are regarded as a research subject relevant to the description of the reception of a theatrical performance, the hypotheses about the structures that shape the process that have been put forward require verification, as there is no direct access to mental processes. These processes can only be studied on the basis of how they manifest themselves (e.g. language, behaviour) and certain regularities of conceptualisation. What underlies this procedure is the assumption put forward by cognitivists that a relation of likeness holds between the individual elements of cognition: perception – conceptualisation – expression. This relation should not be extended to absolute analogy, though, the more so that commenting on a performance just seen we are referring to the cognitive domains that structured our reception of the play only indirectly. Individual acts of expression that manifest themselves in language expressions always constitute reconstruction of the mental experience that stems from our perception of reality; they are never an absolute reflection of it.

Thus the conclusions we draw from a text analysis of a description or interpretation of a performance have to be examined so any inconsistencies stemming from ambiguity, lack of attention or inadequate knowledge on the part of the recipient, or the conditions in which the utterance was recorded are excluded. Contrary to what it may seem, the recipient-oriented factors above do not mean that the concept of ideal recipient who can correctly interpret the performance's meanings is in fashion again. In cognitive studies of performance reception the idea is only to establish a foundation of knowledge that the audience build their interpretation on. We must realise that the author of the descriptive material we are working on may simply have missed out on some stage events or does not have the required knowledge to notice them.

Conditions of verbal expressions constitute one of the main obstacles in reception analysis, according to sociologists. Expectations as to the style of an utterance, its coherence and recipient expectations assumed by the sender blur the actual image of a theatrical experience in the recipient's mind. It does not seem feasible, though, to get rid of these expression-shaping factors entirely. Therefore the only viable solution seems to be a method that would at least partially help determine which elements of expression reflect the actual reception of the play, and which are due to other factors.

The first verification procedure is to look for relations between arranging the elements of the perceived area and a relevant cognitive domain that represents the expressions used by the audience. In her example, Walaszek refers to the peasants who come to the rite in *Forefathers' Eve* as *gromada*. The mental representation of this expression has been schematised as part of abstract relation delineated by the characters' collective behaviour in presence of danger. This stems from Walaszek's interpretation; she juxtaposes the gromada who fights for unity and the peasants who sit idly on the edge of the dais, indifferent to the sense of Konrad's monologue. Highlighting action as the key factor in the image of the gromada is reinforced by other elements of the performance's description. Even if they result from Walaszek's *a priori* assumptions which make up her interpretation, they still can help understand how the concept is

structured. The description contains mostly expressions that describe the gromada's actions; this goes to show that their role in shaping the cognitive domain is undeniable. What it means is that the concept *gromada* is bounded by the principle of co-operation of all its members. Once one gets acquainted with the premises that lead to the conclusion above, one can do research into their relevance and feasibility. Such an experiment can be designed in a variety of ways; the purpose it serves is to ascertain that the gromada plays a significant role in the rite depicted in the play. The simplest solution is to request description of a fragment of the play that is of interest to us. Discussions that I had with my students confirmed the hypothesis that the gromada is quite an important character. Thus, Walaszek's interpretation was justified not only by the factual content of Swinarski's *mise en scène*. Apparently, the audience (that is to say the students) do acknowledge the importance of those elements of Swinarski's version that Walaszek thought were significant. The students also said that the gromada was the central element in the fragment, in that it captured the audience's attention to a greater extent than the ghosts did. When asked about the subject matter of the fragment, most of them were also of the opinion that it was the gromada and some related issues. Those students who stressed the role of the ghosts' part also saw the extraterrestrial visitors as juxtaposed with the *gromada*. Therefore, even though the stimuli and their interpretations may have varied, the research does show that cognitive domains seen as a basis for interpreting a theatrical performance and the process of perception establishing the order of space are related.

If cognitive domains that form the basis of an utterance are to be identified, ambiguity has to be eliminated. The simplest solution seems to be a dictionary. Definitions of *gromada* (*gromada*) and *grupa* ("group") in *Słownik Języka Polskiego* (*Słownik Języka Polskiego*, *op.cit.*: 698, 704) confirm that the cognitive domains in question have been described adequately. One of the definitions states that a group is a unit of arrangement, whereas *grupować* ("to group") is both to combine elements into sets of particular characteristics and to gather around an element. The analysis above refers to the first sense, i.e. classifying elements into sets. This sense is in accordance with the plot (viz. the division into patriots and collaborators) and the visual features of the *mise en scène*. The characteristics of an individual's attire determine which group he (or she, quite often) belongs to; female patriots wear black dresses, smart, dandy-like ones are for "ladies who follow the Senator". In Polish, the word *gromada* (*gromada*) is also frequently used as a verb (*gromadzić się*, to gather, of people and things, also to collect). Thus, the definitions make it clear that the Polish *gromada* refers solely to actions, whereas *grupa* can also be characterised by its attributes. Interestingly enough, in Polish *gromada* is derived from *gmina*, an administrative unit whose objective by definition is to perform certain tasks. Not infrequently these became unfounded, as there are no tasks for them to do or goals to pursue. Swinarski's staging is similar in this respect: what unites the gromada of peasants is their collective action against external aggression.

However, analyses of dictionary data and resulting conclusions require confirmation, in that actual language users have to verify them. The forms of mental representation put forward are but one possibility. A "group" is also a team of people who work on a task together. In this sense it is not much different from a "gromada" united through action. Therefore the proposed distinction between "group" and *gromada* holds only in a particular context. In this case the question is whether *gromada*

(“gromada”) refers to individuals who team up to act together, and *grupa* (“group”) to characters who are visibly different from other groups. An experiment was therefore held, in which subjects were to say whether they thought the following sentences were felicitous:

A. A group of people wearing black could be seen against the crowd.
B. A gromada of people wearing black could be seen against the crowd.

C. The group united against the aggressor.
D. The gromada united against the aggressor.

The experiment was conducted as unrelated to the analysis of the play presented here. Subjects were asked to choose between A and B (and, subsequently, C and D), indicating the more felicitous of the two sentences. The results confirmed the hypothesis that speakers of Polish, when presented with the choice shown above, refer to a selection of individuals who co-operate to do a task as *gromada* (“gromada”), and to a collection of elements shown against other, contrasting elements as *grupa* (“group”). All the 32 people who took part in the experiment thought A was more felicitous than B. In the case of the other pair, 13 subjects chose C as more felicitous, while 9 people thought they were equally acceptable.

The idea behind the method for analysing cognitive domains as a basis of understanding a fragment of a performance is to juxtapose a number of aspects of its expression, ideally independent of each other. Ideologically shaped structures are compared to those determined by grammatical forms or typical mental representations of expressions. An ideological interpretation should also be in line with the staging arrangement that can be seen in fragments of the play’s description. The ultimate order is established by universal rules of perception. Any interpretation expressed in a natural language is rooted in the audience’s experience gained through reception of a performance, if the structure contained in that interpretation manifests itself in an analysis of the remaining aspects of the recipient’s expression.

# III. METAPHOR AND RELEVANCE

## 1. RELEVANCE – AN INTRODUCTION

The category of relevance is a requisite complement to a model of theatrical communication posited in the present study, a model understood as a process of constructing meanings. Every theory purporting to create a model which describes such a process ought to determine its ultimate goal. From the extreme perspective of deconstructivism, the production of meaning occurs within the indefinite context of an utterance. However, an attempt at describing the world is tantamount to an infinite process of some signs being replaced by others and of translating a sign into its interpretants. Remarkably, metaphorical transformations, inherent in the process, allow a free flow of the recipient's thoughts leading to increasingly new streams of associations.

Cognitive semantics, while also making ample use of human imagination, emphasizes the systematicity of the process of metaphorisation and its focus on arriving at relevant conclusions, thus placing a constraint on the process of semiosis. Relevance is then defined as a property of the human mind to arrive at significant conclusions. Unlike in semiotic models, meaning is not secured by the inextricable relation between a denoting element and a meaning denoted by this element (singnified – signifier). Intended polysemy is the only situation when the recipient has to determine the meaning.

The issue of relevance appears for example in Kowzan (1998) who in his *Znak i Teatr* (*Sign and Theatre*) provides an exhaustive treatment of the application of semiological methodology in theatre studies. In the chapter devoted to the presentation of a model of theatrical semiosis, the author discusses, among other things, the problem of various referents referred to by a military cap worn by Macbeth during the play. According to Kowzan, this sign could designate a uniform of a South American dictator, some totalitarian country in Eastern Europe or the notorious African "emperor" Bocassa (*ibidem*: 79). In order to retain the model of a sign as an inseparable relation between the denoted and the denoting, Kowzan proposes treating the numerous referents as aspects of the same sign. He stresses at the same time that the denoted element remains the same in all the three cases referred to by the military cap. Macbeth's authority is perceived as totalitarian in each case.

From the position of the theory of relevance, the crucial point is not the multifaceted construction of the sign but the question why recipients refer to various referents and assign different meanings to the same object. A military cap does not need to characterize Macbeth as a totalitarian ruler, but, for instance, as "merely a soldier",

a character not worthy of a kingly status. Let us leave the ostensible "point" factor, already discussed, which by distinguishing the cap from among other elements induces the audience to make the effort of interpreting. Let us commence from the moment when, according to Kowzan, "a member of the audience, while attempting to grasp the significance of the cap, starts conjuring up in his mind an image of a South American dictator seen on the TV" (*ibidem*). It is Kowzan who points to one of the basic reasons for this particular association. The picture of a dictator seen on the TV constitutes one source of our experiences which shapes our perception of the world. Since th television exerts an extremely powerful influence on human imagination, associations with characters appearing in everyday programs become very probable. Another, apart from experiences, interpretative context comes from the development of the plot. The events shown in the tragedy provide a sufficient basis for Macbeth to be perceived as a totalitarian ruler. The use of a military cap, which evokes the images of contemporary regimes, serves the purpose of substantiating such images in relation to the main protagonist. One should not forget though that not everybody associates a military cap with some actual ruthless tyrant. More generally, it might evoke an image of totalitarian, junta-style government without any reference to a region, country or person. The concept of "totalitarian rule" would be evoked in that case without designating any of its "aspects". Many people do not associate the image of a general with ruthless military rule. Let us leave aside a possible misunderstanding, when contrary to the director's intention, a military uniform brings up positive associations for a member of the audience, and return to our example in which the military cap assigns Macbeth military status. Identifying this particular meaning of the military cap helps to understand that the play was staged in such a way as to illustrate the fact that Macbeth, in his attempt to rule the country, transgresses his own destiny. The way in which Shakespeare's tragedy is understood here corresponds with those interpretations that equate its message with fundamental moral truths which are encapsulated in the commandment: "Thou shall not kill". Murder is against human nature and is punished through "a death of the perpetrator's soul, poisoned by the sheer horror over one's heinous deed, shame, loneliness and despair" (Shakespeare 1992: 147). In the play, this truth is spoken by the doctor called to Lady Macbeth: "Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles" (Shakespeare 1996). Macbeth's deeds are, in addition, against his own nature, that of a faithful and loyal soldier, who suddenly aspires to become a king. On stage, this is shown by means of the cap worn by the hero instead of a crown.

Which of these interpretations will the audience opt for? Will they at all decide to assign any meaning to this cap? After all, the proposed senses are embedded in the plot of the play. Macbeth's deeds might seem to them much more ruthless than those of an obscure general or a colonel on the television. Alternatively, if they are particularly keen on following the intricacies of the plot derived from contradictory prophesies, they will probably fail to notice the hero's headwear.

Theory of relevance does not provide unanimous answers to the above-mentioned questions; instead, it attempts to determine the reasons for specific choices made by the audience. Apart from the rules of an arbitrary code posited by semiotics, the theory draws on their experience, knowledge, sensitivity and expectations. The choice between a South American dictator or the African "emperor" Bocassa as embodiments of authoritarian rule will largely depend on the experience accumulated by the audience while watching news programs. Assigning military status to Macbeth can be traced

back to our knowledge of a particular interpretation of the play. Rejecting the image of modern totalitarianism in favor of the more frightening events in the play is indicative of the recipient's sensitivity. The murders committed by Macbeth can have a stronger impact on some members of the audience than the daily occurrence of violence shown in news programs.

In the example discussed above, possible meanings were suggested by specific codes functioning within a given culture. The recipient could make his/her choice by drawing on the rules of relevance signaled earlier. It is important to realize that, according to Sperber and Wilson's theory of relevance, comprehending signals from the outside is not necessarily based on a pre-arranged code. For the sake of clarification, let us consider a classic example used by Eco to explain the concept of code:

> "In a tank of water there is a device (a kind of float) which having reached level zero sensitizes a transmitter capable of emitting a signal (e.g. an electric one). The signal travels along a certain path until it is intercepted by a receiving device which transforms the signal into a form containing a message for the addressee. In this case, the addressee is the second device, which, properly instructed, on receiving the message starts correcting the initial situation (due to a feedback mechanism causing water to outflow from the tank)" (Eco 1996: 37).

This is the way in which the process of communication occurs in the world of cybernetics. The posited model does not fully represent the situation when man is the recipient of the message. Instructed about the signaling code (for instance: red lamp flashing means the critical water level has been exceeded) he/she will know that the water has gone past the safety level but limit himself/herself to merely identifying the situation. As Eco stresses: "He/she might, for instance, get scared. This fear cannot be categorized as an emotional reaction independent of communication phenomena because it is derived from a communication phenomenon" (*ibidem*: 51). Along the lines of Eco's reasoning, all reactions that arise without a pre-arranged code (one has to be told beforehand about the danger signaled by a red lamp flashing) should be treated as emotional and – in the popular belief – not based on logical reasoning. Let us, however, imagine that alarm is indicated not by a flashing light but a mass of overflowing water seen by an observer. The fear accompanying this phenomenon has not been probably aroused after receiving the code signals, it is not even due to an understanding of the gravity of the situation that one might have already experienced. It is possible to assume that we had never been instructed that in case a dam burst we should escape. Fear and a subsequent adequate reaction will have been triggered by the results of our observations, reasoning, and knowledge.

There are many possible ways in which this process could work. We shall restrict our analysis to two key points. First, one should distinguish between actions based on rational perception of a situation and on an emotional reaction. The fear caused merely by the noise of water falling is hardly characterized by rational thinking and is usually categorized as an emotional reaction. It is not until one realizes that the swirling water moving towards them is a threat, that a conscious emotional reaction (terror) is formed and one takes appropriate steps – most likely through an escape. Reasoning, in this case, is based on generalization. Water is perceived as a mass of some potentially dangerous material moving towards us. Another stage in the reasoning refers to subjective aspects of reception. What might be a threatening swirl of water for a little kid, does not pose that much of a danger for an adult. It is essential, however, about the percep-

tion of alarm is the occurrence of a threat for one's life or health. Hence, if in our subjective view we do not associate the observed events with any danger, then we do not classify a given situation as a cause for alarm. We will escape at the sight of an avalanche crashing down in our direction but not when we see a mass of light snow even though we might suffocate in there. Assessing the danger depends to a large extent on our imagination. It is the lack of imagination that we blame people for if they failed to predict the consequences of atypical occurrences. Imagination, therefore, enriches the conventional pattern of reasoning with a largely subjective evaluation of their validity. It would be naive to say that in our reasoning we did not refer to preconceived concepts, such as a mass of material, its movement and the threat. Defining the observed occurrence as a state of danger emerged as a result of reasoning or assessing the relevance of our conclusions and not as a result of a previously internalised relationship in which a burst dam automatically stands for danger.

Apart from a range of possible options provided by the polysemy of the code, the rule of relevance is even more apparent in reasoning processes. A single sign cannot comprise more than a few definite meanings, of which only one is relevant in a given context. The number of possible conclusions and approaches adopted towards the observance of water bursting through the dam is virtually infinite: the dam was too weak, somebody neglected their duties. When we have to face the elemental fury, the recognition of danger is the essential, the sole relevant conclusion.

In their book *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*, Sperber and Wilson made an attempt to describe rules behind drawing valid conclusions. As mentioned earlier, the authors set out to define relevance as an intuitive skill of constituting new conceptual constructs in order to improve our knowledge of the world. This essentially means reinforcing conceptual structures which provide a better understanding of the world outside, are more easily available in processes of perception and conceptualization, as well as more developed in the realm of individual interest (Sperber, Wilson *op.cit.*: 47).

Reasoning itself is about arriving at relevant conclusions based on one's knowledge and incoming information. Both these sources, being a collection of active assumptions stored in the recipient's mind, serve as a context against which the relevance of particular information is tested. Sperber and Wilson cite three examples of irrelevant sentences when the context is assumed to be a collection of assumptions active in the reader's mind while he/she is reading their book on the theory of relevance (*ibidem*). Let us imagine that the authors utter, at some point, the following sentence:

(1) May 5 was a sunny day in Kabul.

Information included in this statement is in no way connected with the content of the book on the theory of relevance. Intuitively, then, we could say that sentence (1) is irrelevant in the context of communication theory (*ibidem*: 120).

Another sentence whose utterance does not make it possible to draw any valid conclusions in the context of reading Sperber and Wilson's book is the following statement:

(2) You are reading a book now.

The message provides no novel information with regard to the reader's idea about the outside world. He/she is perfectly aware of his/her reading and, more importantly, takes it for granted. It is not true then that statement (2) reinforces in any way his/her conviction as to the facts arising.

Sperber and Wilson's third example of an irrelevant utterance directed at the reader is the following:

(3) You are falling fast asleep.

In this case, the statement contradicts the reader's awareness of his/her own state. The actions of reading a book and falling asleep cannot be performed all at the same time.

The sentences cited above represent three types of cases where relevant information does not interact with the reader's assumptions present in his/her minds – hence becoming irrelevant in a given context. In the case illustrated by sentence (1) about the nice weather in Kabul, the statement provides new information but it is in no way connected with the context specified by the content of the book. The information from sentence (2) is already present in the reader's mind and is functioning as a strong conviction so an additional statement does not change anything. The third sentence (3) depicts a situation where a statement contradicts the other assumptions specified by the context of its utterance (*ibidem*: 121).

At the same time, it should be emphasized that absence of relevance in the analyzed examples was discussed in reference to a given context. Expressing irrelevant content in a given context could in itself be relevant information. It might, for instance, indicate an intention to change the subject of a conversation. One of the basic actions form the perspective of message reception is deciding to discard the information as irrelevant or searching for an adequate context in which it could make sense. According to the theory of relevance, there are three types of context activated by the human mind in order to find relevance:

1. Assumptions formed during communication preceding a given utterance. They are expressed directly or implied by the recipient and easily available because they are stored for a short period of time in short-term memory.

2. Factual knowledge stored in memory in the form of conceptual schemas, interpretative frameworks, action scripts and prototypes.

3. Objects directly indicated by the sender or designated by the speech act itself.

The tendency to search for an adequate context where an utterance becomes relevant can be traced back to the general rule that ostension implies relevance. The recipient's involvement in the search for an adequate context is defined by a rule which determines the relation between an interpretative effort and benefits accrued from drawing conclusions. If, then, activating a given context requires too much effort and conclusions seem trivial, the recipient will dismiss the information as irrelevant in a given situation. From the perspective of an individual, this activity seems to a large extent subjective and, in consequence, elusive. Within particular social groups and cultures there exist various systems of values which enable one to assess whether the effort was worth the final outcome. In the reception of a play, for instance, particular traditions of aesthetics define the relation between an individual's necessary involvement in the process of interpreting the work of art and the values he/she receives in return.

Such assumptions make it possible for the recipient to evaluate the amount of effort necessary to achieve the desired results. Works of art which are too intricate and abstruse could be, after all, rejected, if they were to be analyzed beyond the system of artistic values. The rule of using sophisticated artistic measures is in direct contradiction to yet another rule of relevance, which says that the recipient assumes the sender

to have used the optimal signal to communicate the desired content. The signal, then, should enable the recipient to interpret the message at the least intellectual cost. If we want to inform somebody that our friend John keeps a tiger at home, we could phrase our message in the following manner: "John keeps a big cat at home". Even if our recipient understands our message correctly – "John keeps a tiger at home" – it is quite likely that he would attach an additional sense to the expression "big cat", for instance irony. His reasoning would work on the premise that if one's aim is to merely convey a message, it is enough to say: "John keeps a tiger at home"(*ibidem*: 168).

Thus, irrespective of whether the meaning is denotative, connotative or implicative (inferred from current contexts), the rules of relevance as a range of possible meanings essential for the recipient at a given moment could be subsumed under a few basic rules:

– Ostension implies relevance.

– Relevant information must effect a vital change in our assumptions about the world or about the situation which we are experiencing (or observing).

– The information provided remains relevant with regard to a definite context, construed by the recipient based on the maximum effect/least effort principle.

– When interpreting a message, we assume that the sender has used an optimal signal to communicate the desired message.

## 2. NATURE OF RELEVANCE IN THE RECEPTION OF A THEATRE PERFORMANCE

The above-mentioned rules also apply in the reception of a theatre performance. The difference in reference to language communication as described by Sperber and Wilson lies with the way context is formed, which represents the basis for conclusions or audience reactions. In the theater, unlike in the real world, conventions prevail. The specificity of these differences will depend on the character of the theatre. For the sake of clarity, we will concentrate on the typically European theatre of illusion with its focus on fiction.

First, it is important to realize that in their analysis of natural language the authors of "theory of relevance" separate the verbal message from the context created by the audience perception of the surroundings. In the theatre, such a distinction would restrict available means of communication to dialogues entered into by actors, which does not reflect the true character of the majority of modern stage productions. Alternatively, including the characters' actions and objects on stage would dramatically increase the information load in contrast to a situation when the message is based mainly on sequences of utterances. In the previous chapter we discussed the process of selecting stage elements made by the recipient on the basis of the acts of ostension. This mechanism does not suffice to determine relevant meanings in unequivocal terms. Sperber and Wilson propose, therefore, to adopt the weaker assumption whereby ostension merely suggests relevance but it does not provide it. In that case, we have to allow

for a situation when the audience might notice a particular element but will subsequently dismiss it as having little significance for the content being presented. According to the rules of relevance, an element, apart from highlighting the message, must at the same time import new vital content for the on-going events.

An interesting example can be found in *King Lear* staged by Georgio Strehler. It illustrates the process of assigning meanings to events on stage on the basis of inferencing the three previously mentioned contexts which affect the process of relevance. In the first act of the tragedy Regan and Goneril discuss their father's obstinacy. During the dialogue the two women beat and then fold two halves of tulle material. Interpretation of their actions typically leads to the formation of a metaphorical image in which the two pieces of material stand for the parts of kingdoms they had been given (Lear tore the tulle material in two when he was dividing the kingdom). The actions performed by the sisters reflect their passionless approach to the gift, which they treat as washed linen. After making sure they got equal pieces, they beat, fold and take them away each in her own basket. The question arising in the context of relevance concerns the reasons for assigning particular metaphorical meanings to the described actions.

Folding the torn tulle material could be viewed as a simple sorting-out activity, which helps the two characters to express their emotions. From time to time the sisters pull at the edges aggressively. There are, however, a few reasons for regarding Regan and Goneril's behavior as significant, also in the broader context of stage production. First, the presence of the two pieces of cloth is highlighted right at the beginning of the scene through the use of light which brings them out of the darkness that fell after Lear's exit (context explicitly provided). It would be difficult to assume that the props – to which our attention is drawn – left over after the previous scene were to be unnecessary. Our knowledge of the world helps to identify the sisters' actions as typical activities connected with washing linen (factual context). Finally, tearing the veil by the king at the point when he was dividing his kingdom establishes a relationship between the two pieces of cloth and two parts of the kingdom (implicit context). The metaphorical image representing Regan and Goneril's intention to "wash away the old traditions and customs of their father's rule" is based on activating and linking in the minds of the audience the images of the kingdom and the washing. This metaphor is of great significance for the comprehension of the events presented. The possibilities of its interpretation go beyond the content of the sisters' dialogue. It is also translated into the logic of the whole stage production which establishes a reversed relation between Lear, shown in a few scenes as a child, and the daughters playing the role of mothers (housework, including washing, is stereotypically associated with mother). In the first part of the play Lear seeks understanding with Regan and Goneril who icily refuse to indulge his tantrum. One of the highlights of the play, when Cordelia meets her father, is depicted as a pieta: the daughter-mother strokes his gray hair with tender loving care, which is an idealized image of child – parent relationships.

The metaphor of "washing the old rule off the kingdom" is justified in all three contexts imparting, at the same time important content to our understanding of the presented events. Although, this situation does not guarantee that the metaphor is noticed by the audience but it makes it very probable.

This last conclusion touches upon one of the fundamental differences between the cognitive approach to the process of reception and the traditional ones, especially semiotics, according to which relevance in the theater is ensured by conventions, a kind

of agreement between audience and play producers. The agreement, however, does not free the theatre from the obligation of presenting events in a way that is interesting and relevant for the audience. Just as in other arts, the theater should convey messages and provide experiences which will compensate the recipient's effort made by interpreting the events on stage.

Sperber and Wilson present the general principle of communication as a relationship between suitability expressed in terms of the costs of getting involved in "a dialogue" and the resultant benefits. In the theater, description of this relationship does not stop at comparing the interpretative effort with the importance of the conclusions. The unique character of theatrical encounter affects the free flow of information. Let us consider the middle-class theatre of illusion.

People pay for their tickets, which "literally raises the costs" of watching a performance and, consequently, of audience expectations. Performances usually take place at prime time. About two hours of our precious time must not be wasted. There are also the usual preparations for going out. All this makes play producers feel particularly compelled to "compensate" for the extraordinary costs of visiting the theater.

Audience expectations are also created by the theater itself. It draws on a number of tricks to let the theatergoer feel the unique atmosphere and thus concentrate on the events being presented. Some such methods are based on actions described in the chapter on ostension. Others are linked to sociological aspects of visiting the theatre; they are based on creating a unique atmosphere through the rituals performed at the temple of dramatic art, whether it be a beautiful palace or a secret meeting place for an intellectual elite. Elegant clothes and the required proper behavior intensify this atmosphere. Silence accompanying the performance could be interpreted not only as indicative of the absence of an audience but also as a sign of religious concentration. All efforts are aimed at drawing audience attention to the importance of stage-setting and proving that their effort was worth it. On the other hand, such methods boost expectations of the audience, who are entitled to think that benefits in the form of emotional and intellectual experiences will "reimburse their expenses". The feeling of having wasted one's time and energy to see a play that failed to fulfil one's expectations is directly proportional to the price of the tickets and earlier publicity.

The unique character of a theatrical performance is also – or, rather, most of all – the result of the limited time of perception and of the face-to-face encounter between actors and audience. Within this limited period on stage, actors must get their message across in a manner understandable for non-specialist audience. A similar phenomenon occurs in other arts but, unlike in the theater, the recipients there can increase their knowledge by recourse to different sources of information, which will clarify the essence of a given work. An unknown word in a novel can be immediately looked up in a dictionary; information on a particular style in painting is available in brochures or could be elicited from a guide. In the theater speaking is not allowed and referring to the program is made difficult by the darkness. Rapid developments of the plot do not permit any consultations or considerations. Actors' performance must be therefore perfectly clear or, otherwise, the audience will get lost. The same goes for film makers, though it does not affect actors, who can follow the comments and opinions but are not exposed to negative reactions during the screening. Besides, in the cinema one can leave at any moment. In the theater, however, it is not accepted to leave during the performance, eat potato chips or talk. Actors can easily sense the growing discomfort

and displeasure of the audience trapped in their seats and forced to watch irrelevant antics on stage. Relevance is, after all, one of the basic factors justifying theatrical actions.

## 3. METAPHOR IN THE CONTEXT OF RELEVANCE – AN INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is most often defined as a linguistic figure consisting in "an unusual lexical combination which assumes a certain semantic effort on the part of the recipient, an effort that stimulates by concurrently going against common phraseological habits and justifying the deviation effectuated. The justification needs to be explicit enough for metaphor to be understood as a deliberate effect of verbal art rather than an accidental semantic failure" (*Słownik terminów literackich* 1998: 300). These requisites for metaphor can be presented within the framework of relevance theory, which introduces the principle of maintaining balance between interpretative effort and the benefits it brings. According to this assumption, the recipient will understand metaphor as a deliberate effect of verbal art, if the difficulty of comprehending it gets compensated for by its aesthetic and cognitive value. Thus, although even the strangest of lexical configurations can be interpreted in a metaphorical manner, the final effect of such interpretations often proves unworthy of the effort put into finding the figurative meaning.

From the point of view of cognitive semantics, one primary aim determining the reasons for creating metaphors has to do with their cognitive function and the possibilities of new metaphorical interpretations are predominantly dependent upon the scope of conventionalised popular metaphors used by the recipient. Metaphors thus provide a developing cognitive system which makes it possible to incorporate ever new areas of human experience. According to a theory put forward by Lakoff, metaphor is inseparable from our understanding of the world, in which more abstract ideas are understood in terms of ideas that are closer to our direct experience of the world. That is why metaphor is not limited to innovative constructions of the language of poetry, but is omnipresent in our thinking as conventionalised metaphorical images. Lakoff also demonstrates that treating such metaphors as dead ones is unfounded as they constitute the basis for our inferences about the world. The popular character of metaphors does make the process of their understanding an automatic and, most often, unconscious one but it nevertheless exerts profound influence on the way in which we think about the world. According to Lakoff's definition, metaphor consists in "understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another" (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 27). Cognitively, metaphorical conceptualisation is thus opposed to subcategorisation. Let us take the term "dispute" as an example. Understanding dispute as a kind of conversation is an example of subcategorisation because conversation and dispute have one quality in common, viz. they both involve speaking. Dispute itself, on the other hand, has all the basic characteristics of conversation. The phrase "dispute is war", on the other hand, is metaphorical in nature, which means that we perceive the kind of con-

versation referred to as “dispute” in terms of a fight, as constituting a separate concept. It needs to be noted that the lexical string “in terms of” as used here should be treated as mental representation of a set of experiences on which metaphor is based. Similarly, the verb “is” as used to show metaphorical conceptualisation should be understood as a symbol indicating the process of mapping, i.e. “transferring” the set of source experiences onto the image of the element being metaphorised.

As seen by Lakoff, metaphor is therefore most of all a necessary complementation of our literal way of understanding the world in that it creates systematic structures of metaphorical thinking which is characterised by cohesion. This can be exemplified by a set of metaphors used to talk about death: “death is night”, “death is darkness”, “death is sleep”, “dearth is chill”, “death is rest” (Lakoff, Turner 1989: 86). All these metaphors make references to our knowledge about death and to our everyday experience of night, which is normally dark and cold; people sleep at night and sleep is a rest. Similarly, dead people are cold and motionless as we are when sleeping. It is thanks to such dependencies that the set of metaphors cited above can be deemed to constitute a coherent whole.

Another example of sistematicity across metaphors is provided by metaphors referring to the concept of life: “life is a precious thing”, “life is day”, “life is a flame”, “life is breath”, “life is a life-sustaining liquid”. The systematicity of these metaphors manifests itself in the structures they make use of. The first of those is a cycle of three stages: in the beginning, I did not exist – now I am a living being – I am bound to die one day and will cease to exist again. This structure is used in the metaphors “life is a precious thing”: I did not have anything at the beginning to subsequently gain possession of a precious object, which – bound to lose one day – I should take advantage of; “life is day”: at the beginning there was night, then comes the day, which, however, will at some point come to an end; and “life is a flame”: at the beginning the candle was not lit, then someone lit it up; when it burns out it will go out again. The two remaining metaphors make a reference to the scheme “life is a substance filling up a container”: “life is breath”– we are filled up with divine breath, which leaves us by the end of our lives; “life is a liquid”– we are filled up with life-sustaining juices which we can lose or acquire. It needs to be remembered, at the same time, that sets of mutually coherent metaphors are not determined in an unequivocal manner. They can change according to what sort of structure or experience we make a reference to. The important thing is that making a reference to a source of cohesion will have certain implications with regard to interpretation.

A slightly different type of cohesion is made evident when the use of one metaphor activates other metaphors, which are necessary for creating a certain metaphorical conteptualisation. Conventional metaphors are part of a hierarchical structure. Let us go back to the “death is departure” metaphor. In order to understand it, we had to refer to another conceptualisation: “an event is action”. The same happens in the case of the “death is a reaper” metaphor, whose conceptualisation uses the “people are plants” metaphor.

Apart from the systematicity and cohesion of metaphorical thinking, its second important characteristic is embedment in physical and motive experience of our existence and in representations created by the culture in which we are immersed. The first of these occurs in a situation when concepts having their source in sensory and motive experience of the world get connected with subjective perceptions. And so, for in-

stance, the subjective perception of failing to understand an element of reality is signalled by means of the phrase "I can't grasp that", which is based on concepts coming from sensory-motive experience.

Embedment in representations created by culture, on the other hand, occurs because, as Lakoff elucidates "the most fundamental values of a given culture are coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts present in that culture" (Lakoff, Johnson 1980: 45). Lakoff exemplifies his observation with some values present in the consciousness of American society and notes how these are in agreement with spatial metaphors based on the top-bottom relation:

"More is better" is coherent with "more is up" and "good is up".

"Bigger is better" is coherent with "more is up" and "good is up".

"The future will be better" is coherent with "future is up" and "good is up".

"In the future there will be more" is coherent with "more is up" and "future is up".

"Your status should be higher in the future" is coherent with "high status is up" and "future is up".

These examples of cohesion demonstrate how deeply rooted typical spatial metaphorical representations are in American culture, within which the sentence "The future will be better" expresses the concept of progress. The expression "In the future there will be more" is connected with such situations as pay rise and acquisition of more and more goods. "Your status should be higher in the future" is an expression referring to making a career (*ibidem*). One of the sources of our metaphorical perceptions is therefore the experiencing of the culture in which we are immersed.

The characteristics of metaphorical thinking presented so far lead to a situation whereby the popular assumption that understanding metaphors is very difficult can only be applied to some of the metaphorical uses, namely those created within aesthetic systems that value most of all the artistry of composition and surprising consequences of unlikely combinations. Metaphor, however, most often fulfils a cognitive function, helping the recipient understand the message; this is so because we base our thinking about the metaphorical concepts being presented on our knowledge of the element of the source metaphor. The embedment of this element in our sensory-motive as well as cultural experience also means that a metaphorical concept becomes more familiar to us and as such of more significance to our life, thus raising the degree of relevance of the message being communicated. This function of metaphor seems even more important in the process of reception of a theatre performance, whose task it is, as has been pointed out above, to convey serious messages that could at the same time be easily understood by the audience.

Before we embark on a thorough discussion of metaphor in theatre, let us complement our synopsis of Lakoff's theory with a presentation of his classification of metaphor, without which a full appreciation of the systematicity of metaphorical structures is not feasible.

The first type that Lakoff proposes are so-called primary metaphors. They are a product of the combination of sensor-motive experience and subjective impressions. They provide fundamental schemata for more complex metaphors. As they are structured on immediate meaningful concepts, they form a physical logic basis for metaphorical motivations. For the most part, they make use of imagination schemata, e.g. "happy is up", "categories are containers", "organization is physical structure". However, Lakoff opines that less clearly structured experiences can also result in primary

metaphors; examples here are: “action is self-propelled motion”, “affection is warmth”, “purposes are destinations” or “causes are physical forces”.

A second type of metaphor, viz. conceptual metaphors, is more complex. Conceptual metaphors project the intricate structure of the source element onto the metaphorized element. They are also rooted in our sensory-motive (and not infrequently cultural) experience, and make use of primary metaphor concepts. Lakoff brings up an oft-quoted example that is universal across a number of cultures, viz. the metaphor of life as “journey”. It starts at birth and goes on along a road that we choose, hoping it will take us where we head, that is our goal in life. Having no such goal means you are “lost”, “your life has taken an unknown turn” or “you don’t know which way to go”. If you do have a purpose in life you can try to achieve it “in various ways”, “planning each step along the way”, trying to overcome possible obstacles “in the way”, etc. Thus what we are dealing with here is a complex concept that can metaphorically be formulated as “life is a journey toward a goal”; the metaphor is founded on the simple image schema: source – path – goal. It arises as a result of the widespread belief that everyone should have a goal in life and that they should take action in order to achieve the said goal.

Since “action” can be metaphorically understood as “motion” and “destination” can be “points in space”, the principle of having a purpose in life can be reformulated as “Every person should have a point, a goal in life, which to reach by a chosen road”. This conceptualization brings about a number of metaphorical expressions, whereby “life is a journey toward a destination”, “man is a traveller”, “life goals are destinations”, “life plan is an itinerary”, “experience is baggage” or “time flow is the distance covered”.

The significance of the metaphorical images we call to mind in relation to our functioning in everyday reality stems mainly from the fact that thinking about life we often apply the knowledge of traveling that we have; thus:

“A journey requires planning a rout to your destination”.

“Journey may have obstacles, and you should try to anticipate them”.

“You should provide yourself with what you need for your journey”.

“As a prudent traveler you should have an itinerary indicating where you are supposed to be at what times and where to go next. You should always know where you are and where you are going next”.

This line of thinking not only enriches the mental image of the concept of “life”, but also impinges on our social behavior. Thus we tend to be impressed by those who go far in a short time and we sympathize with those who have not reached the goal as planned. We see those who are going in an indefinite direction as “lost”, in need of a guide through life. We commiserate with those who “missed the boat”. A “late start” is another mishap that life has in store for us (*ibidem*: 60–63).

The examples do not exhaust the selection of conclusions that can be derived if life is metaphorically understood as a journey. However, they are indicative of how understanding based on the metaphorizing image is transferred onto the metaphorized one. A significant aspect of the process is the aforementioned systematicity of metaphors. Firstly, primary metaphors are used in compound conceptualizations, as “life is a journey” is based on key metaphorical concepts: “action is motion in space” and “destinations are points in space”. On the other hand, complex metaphors (e.g. “death is passing”) complement more general concepts, such as “event is action”. As we can

see, metaphors are not based on random connotations and accidental associations but, like understanding in general, are subject to constraints. Thus metaphorical conceptualizations, natural to the process of thinking, largely determine the procedure of drawing relevant conclusions. By shaping patterns of proper comprehension that is in accord with the logic of the source element, they become subjected to the principle of avoiding trivial conclusions.

## 4. VISUAL METAPHOR

Lakoff's theory of metaphor as an element omnipresent in human thinking seems to be more appropriate for the theatre situation than the classic approach, stressing most of all the uncommonness of metaphorical expression as a stylistic means. The nature of theatrical performance normally makes it impossible to ponder over the meaning of a complicated metaphorical image. It is possible to do so only when the metaphorical meaning is present in greater parts of or even throughout the performance. This work is nevertheless concerned with the process of interpretation of particular acts and stage images, which last short enough for their interpretation to happen mostly automatically, as if outside the recipient's consciousness. This is not to say that a theatrical production can only make use of conventionalised metaphors, whose interpretation has been unequivocally defined within a given culture. Stepping outside the popular metaphorical images does not have to be on a par with the necessity to spend a long time to comprehend over the meaning of the new image. Supporting this argument, Lakoff provides yet another example of a popular metaphor – "love is a journey" – and of an expression based on it, one coming from the lyrics of a song entitled "We are driving in the fast lane on the freeway love". According to Lakoff, "most people will surely have no problem with an immediate understanding of the meaning of this metaphor, despite the fact that it constitutes a poetic development of the concept »love is a journey«. They will surely not notice that in order to understand this expression, one needs an interpretation. The perception of a love relationship as a fast drive on the highway quite automatically leads to the conclusion that the relationship is progressing at a very fast pace. This in turn means the danger of an accident, which could destroy the relationship in an instant. And the pace of the events and the accompanying danger are for the lovers a kind of an alluring stimulus" (*ibidem*: 66–67). This example proves that a huge part of our reasoning (about 95%, as relevant research shows) takes place outside of our consciousness in an automatic way; it nevertheless uses the same source patterns as conscious reasoning.

The unconscious nature of many processes of metaphorisation taking place in the human mind means that the interpretations and conclusions based on them are sufficiently quick. It can then can be safely assumed that metaphorical conceptualisation constitutes an important part of the reception of even short fragments of a theatrical performance. However, defining the nature of metaphorisation in drama is not an easy

task, a state of affairs made evident by a number of theoretical studies that associate metaphor with natural language only. According to Mayen, the iconicity of an artistic sign is an impediment to the birth of a metaphor, which constitutes "a conscious metalinguistic act consisting in the association of distant concepts and in the interpretation of meanings" (Wysłouch 1994: 64) A similar perspective is adopted by Ziomek, for whom "the transformation of a name into an image of the signified destroys the principle of each metaphor, it is a game between the disappearance of one part of the connotation and the accentuation of another" (*ibidem*).

A slightly different approach is taken by Lotman, who, analysing Eisenstein's *October*, sees as metaphorical the scene based on the parallelism between the image of the Mensheviks delivering speeches and the musical instruments. Similarly metaphorical is according to Lotman another scene in Eisenstein's movie – that of Kierenski climbing the stairs. In this case, however – as the author emphasises – "the meaning is the result of playing with the double lexical meaning of the phrase »to climb up«" (Lotman 1983). Within Lotman's approach metaphorical meaning is thus mediated by language; this approach has been best verbalized in Eichenbaum's claim, whereby "the audience can only understand a film (visual) metaphor if a given metaphorical phrase is part of their lexical repertoire" (Helman 1992).

Understanding metaphor as a construction limited to natural language is rejected in a work by Wysłouch, who proves by means of several illuminating examples that metaphor can exist also within an image and without the slightest support of words. The author questions most of all the solely signifying character of an iconic sign; she emphasises its conventional aspect, making it possible to simplify and schematize the sign. Iconicity does not then preclude ambiguity, which is the basis of the metaphorization process – ambiguity makes it possible "for an image to designate an object, but at the same time imply characteristics, which do not belong to this object, being unfamiliar to its nature" (Wysłouch *op.cit.*). One of the examples Wysłouch uses to explain the process of shifting connotation (which leads to the birth of a metaphor) is Linke's painting *Houses-Soldiers*. It shows destroyed and burnt-out tenement houses whose contours have the shape of soldiers. This visual identification of houses with soldiers leads to the personification of houses, which suffer and fight just as people do, as well as implies such soldierly virtues as perseverance, heroism and sacrifice.

Metaphor can thus exist within an image, thanks to predominantly "the simplification and schematization of the sign", acts enabling ambiguity of the message. According to Wysłouch, simplification and schematization allow metaphor to appear in the image under one condition. Namely, the signifying (referential) function of the objects being presented needs to be attenuated. A similar way of explaining the issue of ambiguity of an image is offered by cognitive semantics, the difference being that – in line with the assumptions of cognitivism – the presentation of particular objects in a simplified form is not only based on the convention adopted, but springs from the very nature of understanding the reality that surrounds us. Defining relevant features of a given object, convention is secondary vis a vis the general rule of metonymic representation, based on a relation of a part instead of a whole. We recognize a lot of animals on the basis of the shape of their head or a distinctive fur pattern, without the need for looking at their body as such. When we see a lion from the front we do not forget that it also has got a tail. It is through such fragmentary perception of the world that creation of ambiguous images (on which metaphor is based) is made possible.

However, the principle of metonimy itself explains only the way in which metaphor can be embedded within an image. It does not explain the meaning-creation processes that it will trigger, or, in other words, the rules that could help one to define the meaning of a given metaphor and to determine whether every unusual combination should be interpreted as a metaphor. In his paper *Can metaphor be seen?* Porębski, questioning the visual existence of metaphor, stresses the lack of any semantic rules, which means that at the level of connotation it is possible to come up with any interpretation, provided that we are intent on doing so. It would not be unfounded to accept Porębski's remark, if the meaning of metaphor were the result of an unrestricted sequence of associations conjured up by an image. The interpretation of metaphor is however subject to the rule defining the meaning that is at a given moment of significance to the recipient. This rule provides that the information contained in the metaphorical image remains relevant when referred to a concrete context, created by the recipient on the basis of the maximum effect/least effort principle.

In order to see how this principle works in practice, let us consider Okun's painting *Woman-Flame*, which appeared on the cover of "Chimera" in 1902. What we see there is the shape of a human being: face, breasts and arms stretched forward. The other parts of the body: hair, legs and toes are turning into flames. The former attributes suggest that the human being is a woman, and the latter allow us to identify her with fire. Is this a metaphorical image, though? If the painting appeared in a comic strip, we would treat the woman as another sci-fi hero of supernatural power. The body parts/flames would tell us about her exceptional properties, which, in the fictitious world of comic strips, would be nevertheless entirely literal as opposed to metaphorical. Okun's painting, however, appeared on the cover of *Chimera*, a literary-modernist journal. In this context the unlikely combination of woman with fire calls for a metaphorical interpretation. One of the possible explanations imposing itself is ascribing to the woman such characteristics of flames as ephemerality, warmth or ability to destroy. Importantly, ascribing qualities characteristic of fire to a woman does not happen arbitrarily. The red or yellow colour of flames is rather meaningless in the case of this metaphor. Another feature of flames is their purifying power. Can it be applied to a woman as well? Provided that we make an interpretative effort, we can justify an affirmative answer to this question. All it takes is to treat the woman as a symbol of love, and to present love as a purifying flame which can be metaphorically ascribed the ability to purify human soul. Such an interpretation nevertheless seems less relevant than an explanation ascribing ephemerality – which is characteristic of flames – to a woman. True to fact, the metaphor facilitates in both cases the comprehension of abstract concepts (the purifying power of love and woman's ephemerality) though their visual presentation, but the interpretative effort is different in each case. This is so because the ephemerality of flames is ascribed to the woman on the basis of two highly conventionalized cognitive operations, and as such easy to grasp. The first of these operations establishes metonimically a relationship between appearance and nature of a given human being, the second on the other hand uses the culturally deeply-rooted metaphor "nature is an element".

It took three cognitive operations (less conventionalized, at that) to identify the "purifying power of love" metaphor in *Woman-Flame*. Thus in relation to Okun's work the feature of volatility that a woman can have (as symbolized by the flame) is more relevant than the interpretation that stresses the "purifying power of love". The Principle

of Relevance makes it clear why the source element of the metaphor is in this case the flame rather than the woman. Although the cognitive operations that lead to the personification of flames are not beyond most people's mental capabilities, they are likely to attach more importance to information concerning female nature than to conclusions that can be drawn from personification of fire. Thus the Principle of Relevance does not unequivocally determine metaphorical meaning, but it does establish certain rules to apply in the pursuit of the metaphorical meaning of an image.

What we can conclude at this point is that the concept of visual metaphor as independent of natural language system is only feasible under the following conditions:

1. Metaphorical thinking induced by perceived images manifests itself beyond direct verbalization.
2. Metaphors expressed by visual means lack satisfactory verbal counterparts.
3. Interpreting a metaphor is not about juxtaposing two concepts but about investigating the specificity of the resulting image by making the recipient re-evaluate his stereotypical perceptions.

Metaphor in theatre should be subject to similar conditions. Stage performances do contain language metaphors, but they can only be interpreted in relation to the whole of the *mise en scène*. Therefore the examples below will serve mostly to analyze visual aspects of metaphor in theatre.

To exemplify the first of the conditions above, let us bring up a scene described by Aleksander Tairow to depict the theatrical metaphors put together in the director's mind.

> "Imagine a hero on stage. He wants to rebel against God. He leaves the Earth to face him and to challenge him. He is climbing up a heap of daises – nothing can stop him. He has reached the top; just one daring leap and there he is, facing God. But the leap is a tremendous effort, one that not even the best of actors can make. Imagine then, that just at that very moment […] this special stage atmosphere comes into play, magnifies his action a thousandfold, at one with the actor – one inseparable, theatrical whole. And here he is, not just a man, but a giant, […] and he can be **trusted** [emphasis – W.B.] to fearlessly face even the awe-inspiring gaze of Deity or Destiny" (Tairow 1978: 121).

The fragment seems to suggest that the driving force behind the character's action is the metaphoric arrangement of the set upward; together with his ultimate endeavor, it magnifies his symbolic gesture a thousandfold. Moreover, Tairow's emotional involvement in the described fragment should ideally bring about a similar contribution on the part of the audience. The involvement, though, is not merely due to the transparency of the metaphor ("up is more – more power, more might, strength, divinity"). It is the very set, the stage arrangement that magnifies the character's action, making the audience conjure up an image that has them feel and trust the might of the character they are facing. The protagonist becomes a giant not by means of ready-made applicable linguistic metaphors, but through the feelings one is apt to have watching the stage events.

This description also exemplifies the second condition. No natural language can express a situation whereby stage actions bring to mind numerous associations that lie at the source of the metaphor. It is so because languages are linear in character, so any possible description is analytical and cannot be equated with stage images. The simul-

taneity of a theatrical performance allows for the co-existence of many elements of the same metaphoric image, a phenomenon that is hardly feasible in language.

To exemplify, let us study the way a popular metaphor – "life is theatre" – was depicted in the XVI century. At that time performances were meant to present the world's order as consistent with the teaching of the Catholic church. Thus the set for Calderon's *The Great Theater of the World* emphasized certain aspects relevant to that belief. As described in one performance, "two spheres open simultaneously; one contains a throne for the Author, the other a stage with doors to the left and to the right". On one door a cradle is painted, on the other a coffin. The stage elements clearly determine which components of the metaphoric image are stressed. Emphasis is put mainly on the beginning and end of life, understood here as entering the stage and leaving it. The cradle and the coffin never leave the stage; thus the brevity of life and the inevitability of death are symbolically represented. The Author, who is always there, overseeing the human actors, signifies the existence of a complete script. Thus all the human actors have to do it to appropriately play the roles they have been assigned.

In Calderon's "theatre of life" the omnipresence of the Author and the symbols of beginning (cradle) and end (coffin) is of paramount importance to understanding human fate. Both concepts are theoretically translatable into verbal expressions, yet as the literary plot develops the reader has to be reminded of them every now and then. It would take quite a skilled writer to do so in a way that would not be irritatingly repetitive. In theatre, on the other hand, the audience develop natural awareness of the Author's presence, a God overseeing the stage, and of the two most significant moments in every man's earthly life symbolically represented by the two images painted on the doors: the cradle and the coffin.

The last stipulation conditioning the introduction of visual metaphor is almost missing from theoretical approaches and frequently neglected in published interpretations. This fact is due to a belief that a metaphor is based on perceiving an unexpected relation between two images and that it is interpreted on the basis of an unconstrained chain of random associations. However, as we have already said, it is in contrast to the principle of meaning as relevant in a context. The context is structured by the recipient on the basis of the "maximum benefit optimum effort" principle. The relationship between the input in an interpretation (the effort) and the resulting output (the benefit) can again be exemplified by Woman-Flame. However, meaning is by definition structured against a context, therefore a theatrical metaphor is only feasible when the relevance-forming process of thinking refers to visual aspects of a theatrical image.

To see how it works in practice, let us analyze how our mind conjures up a possible interpretation of a selected scene from Rudolf Ziola's *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The scene is at Theseus' court. The court and the retinue form an uneven semi-circle, open toward the audience. In the center of the circle there is Hermia, lying on the ground, cast there by her father Egeus. Such an image leaves no doubt as to the fact that Egeus' daughter is the protagonist in the scene, especially that all the other characters are facing her. Still, Hermia is in an unenviable position. We know it not only on the basis of Shakespeare's text, but also looking at the stage arrangement. Hermia is lying while all the other characters are standing. The recipient can therefore infer that the girl is somehow subordinate to the others as, metaphorically speaking, less important is down.

Those familiar with the play will recognize the scene as the one when the king is supposed to decide whether Demetrius is to marry his daughter. The audience can thus identify the situation as testing a future son-in-law. They will consequently invoke a series of conventional metaphors to conceptualize the scene they are watching. However, it is only through a single stage detail that the relevant metaphoric image around which conceptualization centers can be identified. In the play under analysis it is the spatial arrangement of characters; it can suggest another metaphor, viz. matchmaking a daughter is trade, just like in the case of a regular commodity at a market place. Theseus, standing to the right, is the seller, as the fate of the girl is in her hands. Demetrius, facing him, acts as the buyer. The semi-circle of other characters acts as a crowd of onlookers watching the transaction. Hermia, the most important element of the arrangement, is the commodity. Thus there are two facts to suggest Hermia's prime position in the scene – the spatial arrangement of characters and her function in the deal depicted on stage.

The girl's role in the transaction is of far-reaching significance to her. As the subject of a deal, she is void of any influence on her future. Thus, reference to a mental image based on a complex conceptual metaphor can reinforce suggestions derived from primary metaphors and from the very plot. Oftentimes it carries additional meaning, adding another dimension to the situation in question. When Lysander, Hermia's lover, rushes onto the stage, he is stopped by the guards who will not have him enter the semi-circle of actors. In accordance with the metaphor adopted for this scene, Lysander is debarred from the transaction under process. This gives the whole scene an extra dimension of double crossing. The auction is a one-buyer-only event; any other competitors are removed by force.

In many ancient cultures the father was given the right to decide who his daughter should marry, so in fact Egeus' behavior is nothing out of the ordinary. However, presented as a commercial transaction, the father's deed is seen in quite a negative light. Still, the audience cannot assess Egeus merely on the basis of a metaphor (here: matchmaking a daughter is trade). It is so because certain conclusions that can be drawn from the metaphor are not confirmed by the acting. One would be hard put, for example, to try to interpret Egeus as a greedy old man. His behavior does not at any moment suggest that he would like to be remunerated for his daughter. Such a conclusion would be clearly far-fetched. The logic of image unity has it that Hermia's objectification is the key issue, not the greed or cruelty of her oppressors.

Thus interpreting a metaphoric image is subject to certain regulations in line with the systematicity of reasoning. It proceeds in accordance with metaphoric images established in the mind; they are manipulated so as to account for stage events. There is always room for freedom of interpretation, but it is not justifiable in the light of our knowledge of conceptualization. This rule is also present in the model for the process of building up visual metaphors, structured on the foundations of cognitive semantics and Relevance Theory.

1. Metaphors occur on the basis of acts of ostension that focus the audience's attention on a single element of a given *mise en scène*; these elements are at the source of the given metaphors.

2. In line with the cognitive principle that ostension implies relevance, the recipient attempts to add meaning to the element highlighted by the act of ostension. The as-

signed meaning should be relevant in a context structured by the recipient on the basis of the "maximum benefit optimum effort" rule.

Thus a metaphoric image that the recipient conjures up is the most relevant interpretation of the act of ostension. It holds that a given element is highlighted with a view to making the audience interpret other stimuli within the framework of the stimuli represented by the source element, i.e. the one that catches attention.

3. The metaphoric image that the audience conjure up is confronted against what they actually see on stage.

The metaphorization model proposed in this dissertation merits a few words of explanation. The first assumption holds that a single element in a given *mise en scène* is highlighted; it proscribes juxtaposition of two elements. At the root of such an approach lie individual cases whereby metaphorical meaning is structured without any clear delineation of two independent stage stimuli. Let us refer back to Lotman's example of Kierynski from Eistenstein's movie *October*. The character's upward mobility in quest of power is symbolized by his climbing a flight of stairs. Here the meaning is clearly the result of interpreting a single image (going upstairs) rather than a unique concurrence of two images. If two images are put together, it is primarily an act of ostension based on the principle of estrangement, whereby the audience have to interpret the extraordinary concurrence. Only when the audience's attention is directed toward one of the images, which consequently becomes the source element, can we speak of metaphor. In an attempt to understand Okun's work (see earlier), one has to decide whether to approach it in terms of metaphoric objectification ("woman is flame") or metaphoric personification ("flame is woman"). Focusing on the source element of a metaphor is a result of its cognitive value. In order to "interpret a stimulus within the framework of other stimuli", the stimulus to be interpreted has to be in the center of attention as a source of our reasoning.

The second premise of metaphorization holds that metaphor entails interpretation, that is to say assigning relevant meanings to selected images or actions. An unexpected element on stage, or an unexpected concurrence of two elements, is not the sole guarantee of a metaphor. Let us imagine a father, the head of a family, sporting a royal crown. The focusing element in this case is the rather original headgear. The situation is explicable in metaphoric terms once we assume that the father purports to be the king in his family, but it does not exclude other interpretations. The father may simply be playing with his children and acting as a king in a family game; he may just as well be terribly absent-minded, trying to go out wearing a paper crown rather than a hat. Neither of the alternative interpretations is metaphorical; they are interpretable within the framework of a situational context composed of world knowledge, past experience and interpretations thereof, and immediate observational data.

Finally, the third assumption that we postulate for the process of metaphorization underlines the necessity to confront metaphorical images in the recipient's mind and the actual, observable stage events. A metaphorical image that is not supported by actual actions taking place on stage loses its visual dimension. It may be explicable in another context, but freedom of interpretation is largely constrained by consistency with observational data. To return to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (for analysis see earlier): the audience could clearly see Egeus casting his daughter to the ground, where she lay, among the crowd surrounding her. When interpreted in line with the suggested metaphor ("matchmaking a daughter is trade"), the conclusion that Hermia becomes

a mere object is strongly founded. The father's behavior clearly suggests that for him his daughter is little more than a commodity. Nothing indicates his greediness, though such an interpretation is theoretically plausible when we analyze the metaphor in question. There is no indication that Egeus expects to be paid or otherwise rewarded for selling his daughter.

On balance, the outcome of the model for metaphorical conceptualization put forward in this thesis is that the recipient structures the metaphor rather than identifies it. Assigning metaphorical meanings, in essence, proceeds according to the same principles as any other meaning-creative process. Acts of ostension imply relevance and trigger interpretation processes leading to highlighting individual elements as relevant in a context. If it is metaphorical meaning that turns out to be the most relevant in the context, we can speak of metaphor. Whether or not a metaphor is theatrical depends on its source, the perceivable element of a *mise en scène*, and the necessary confrontation of a metaphorical image in the mind and the actual stage events.

## 5. ASPECTS OF INTERPRETATION CHARACTERISTIC OF METAPHOR IN THEATRE

Visual metaphors do not fully do justice to the situation of a theatrical performance, which most often draws also on natural language. However, the proposed model makes it possible to allow for words spoken on stage by defining them as one of possible ways to activate actual conceptualizations in the recipient's mind. The conceptualizations are then confronted with conceptualizations originated through visual perception. For instance, a metaphor realised explicitly by means of words may be verified or developed by an accompanying picture. Despite that, a metaphor cannot be defined as theatrical by specifying its characteristic features, for instance, as originating in the interaction between spoken language and an image. Just as with ostension and conceptual structures, theatricality can be only treated as a characteristic context juxtaposed with general rules of forming metaphoric conceptualization. This context, on the one hand, will fit in with the principles of perception but on the other, it will constitute knowledge about theatre derived from stereotypical beliefs and commonly accepted conventions. The description of a context thus understood, shows that one has to resort to a specific tradition to speak of metaphor theatricality. The tradition determines, at least in part, the essential components of a theatrical performance. This task goes well beyond general theoretical considerations, yet given the necessity to specify certain essential aspects which have to be taken into account whilst characterising theatrical metaphor, I shall resort to the practice of the theatre of illusion of the XX century Europe.

## Types of Theatrical Metaphors

In a model of visual metaphor – as already emphasised – the source component is most powerfully embedded in the sensually-perceived theatrical matter. Likewise, according to the "part – whole principle", it can be brought down to a single aspect: a relation, an object or a gesture. The entirety of a metaphorical image is, however, complex and, to a larger extent dependent on features concerning mental representation than the conventions of stagecraft. That is exactly why any classification of theatrical metaphors should be based upon various precisely designated types of source components. Such a division, though, depends on particular theatrical conventions, which highlight the significance of particular aspects of staging. It appears, though, that classifying metaphors into those originating from spatial structures, the presented objects or gestures is commonly accepted and very well serves the purpose of being a model classification for theatrical metaphors.

1. The metaphorical character of spatial structures could be seen, among others, in the production of *Balladyna* in which Iwo Gall (Teatr Wybrzeże, Gdańsk, premiera 27 X 1974) designed one stage space for all acts of the performance in order to avoid intermittent intervals caused by changing the scenery. The solution, proposed by this excellent scenographer, had nothing to do with using the simultaneous stage, where all locations are crammed for the sole purpose of a swift movement of characters, without having to change the setting. This solution often strikes as artificial and relies on the audience to agree for this type of convention. Through the use of the metaphoricity of space, Iwo Gall assigned a number of senses to his scenographic solution, which were essential for interpreting the play, and he hid the practical function of a simultaneous presentation of several locations. Let us see how the stage space in *Balladyna* was described by Konstanty Puzyna:

> "The upper storeys in the form of inclined planes meeting in the middle were covered by a wood-like decoration. […] On the lowest level, Gall placed a hermit's grotto. Two other pieces of decoration: the portal of the castle and an exquisite fragment of the Widow's cabin were arranged on either side of the stage […]. This arrangement of the stage placed the stage action within two worlds each of a unique autonomy but pieced together: in the kingdom of Goplana – on the upper storey – and in the world of common people – on the lowest level" (Puzyna 1947: 6).

This configuration of stage space enabled the audience to interpret the relations between both the individual characters of the play and groups of characters. The hermit's grotto was placed in a central position of the stage action. It is, however, situated on the lowest level – the level of man's world dwarfed by Goplana's kingdom from the higher storey. Gall, thus, showed the superiority of the supernatural world over man's fate. Such an interpretation of spatial relations was reflected in the arrangement of scenes. Contrary to the text of the play, in the first scene, there was a dialogue between Goplana and the gnomes. The change of the sequence of events led to Goplana telling Skierka to stop the Kirkor's carriage in front of the widow's cabin before young Kirkor set out on his journey. The power of the supernatural world was magnified in the play "at the expense of the legendary and the historical" (*ibidem*).

Another staging device was to place the Widower's cabin and the castle on two opposite sides of the stage, which, as Puzyna wrote in his review – "placed the action

within two worlds each with its unique autonomy". In the scenic image one can see a gap between the simple and carefree life of the common people and the false, insidious life of the court. The common ground for the inhabitants of both worlds is Goplana's kingdom and the region of Goplo as part of it. On each occasion a character has to choose which world they want to return to because the worlds are divided (literally – physically on stage) which prohibits any form of cohabitation. It is significant that the Widow's cabin was located on the left side of the stage and the castle on the right. Thus, the space adjacent to the respective buildings became characteristically marked: in the positive manner in the case of the Widow's cabin on the right side and negatively for the castle positioned on the left side of the stage.

2. One of the more straightforward examples of the metaphor of objects is the father with the gold crown which is indicative of his unlimited royal power. In the theatrical practice one can notice much more interesting images, for example, the scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Rudolf Zioło.

In the first scene of act IV the action takes place on a glade in a forest where Titania tries to seduce Bottom, who was transformed by Puck. In Zioło's production, however, this place reminds one of a room for smoking opium. The stage is enveloped in fumes. Pale figures move about listlessly while one of the ghosts smokes a cigarette with gusto. An element of sexual deviance is also present in the form of the master of ceremonies, whose ballerina costume is a copy of a transvestite outfit photographed during a fancy dress party in New York. As a result, the meadow in the forest becomes a forbidding and dangerous place. The space of a dream embracing the whole forest becomes increasingly dense posing a threat for anyone who dares to enter the area of stupefaction and unbridled instincts. There might be no return from the world of opium stupor to the world of reality and order.

Showing a glade in the forest as an opium club leads to a metaphor which enables us to see the place where Titania courted Puck as suspicious and dangerous. An additional advantage of this particular solution lies in the director's reference to the audience experience. The atmosphere of a room for smoking opium is universally known, fortunately, in most cases only from the cinema screen or the television. The threat posed by the growing popularity of drugs is perceived by contemporary audience to be more real and frightening than the magic rituals of ancient elves.

3. The "father is king" metaphor was mentioned as an example of a metaphor of objects. The metaphor was suggested by the gold crown on the king's head but the "kinghood" could be also reinforced by adequate gestures not necessarily performed by the father himself. A good example is provided by the protagonist from Gombrowicz's *Wedding*; he kneels in front of his father and thus bestows his parent the kingly dignity. This type of metaphor seems particularly characteristic of theatrical practice for two reasons. First, it emphasises the actor's role in assigning meanings to other stage elements (not necessarily to the characters). Second, it uses, in a natural way, the relation of a conceptual structure: part – whole to build a metaphoric image. This process is based on placing an object in a context that will change its meaning. A crown on the head of an ordinary father creates surprise and, as a metaphor, it defines his relation towards other members of the family. The son kneeling in servile obedience in front of his father in Gombrowicz bestows kingly dignity on him in a manner somewhat less controversial.

It can be safely assumed that in some cases we shall not be able to determine unequivocally the character of the metaphor's source component within the framework of the classification proposed. However, identifying the source of metaphor is indispensable in view of ensuing interpretative consequences. In the scene showing marrying Hermia as if it was a buy-sell agreement, audience attention is drawn both by Egeus' gesture when he pushes her into the middle of the stage, and the way in which the other characters are spatially arranged, which suggests the girl's subservience to them. Both the instances fitted the framework of the same metaphor: "marrying one's daughter is a trade". In the first one, though, the metaphor defines, first of all, the relations between father and daughter, but in the second, it highlights Hermia's plight in relation to the entire situation: her inability to make her own decisions.

## Metaphorical systematicity: highlighting and hiding

The meaning-related process of highlighting and hiding is possible due to the systematic nature of metaphors. Lakoff explains that:

> "the very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another (e.g. comprehending an aspect of arguing in terms of battle) will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e.g. the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor. For example, in the midst of a heated argument, when we are intent on attacking our opponent's position and defending our own, we may lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. Someone who is arguing with you can be viewed as giving you his time, a valuable commodity, in an effort at mutual understanding. But when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects" (Lakoff, Johnson, *op.cit.*: 11).

Therefore it becomes easier to see the pros of an argument if it is understood within the framework of another metaphor, for example "arguing is exchanging opinions".

Thus, by altering the metaphor which shapes our understanding of a concept, we can highlight or hide its aspects. If the matchmaking procedure in *Midsummer Night's Dream* is understood as selling the bride-to-be, the image is different than if she were "given away as a present". A wedding ceremony where the bride is a human sacrifice, meant as beneficial for her society, takes on yet another meaning.

Interestingly, shifts in highlighting or hiding the aspects of a concept can take place within the same metaphor, along with cultural changes. The XVI century image of "the grand theatre of the world" is presented differently in the comedy of manners, a later phenomenon. "The great stage of life", which spans one's lifetime from birth till death, is here replaced by a bedroom, a boudoir, or possibly a park. Such a space cannot highlight the fact of going on and off stage in any particular way. The appearance of a character on the stage of life is structured by their ability to take part in parlour games. The game itself, decisive in whether a character shines socially or not, is to be seen as putting on a mask, dictated by social conventions, or assuming a role to achieve a particular purpose. Maskaryl, the servant in *Amusing Dandies*, has a telling name.

The comedy of manners lacks a pre-conceived scenario which would be overseen by an omnipresent Author. Good acting simply means being able to hide under the umbrella of the part one is playing. Molière's Tartuffe, for one, is expert at doing so. A perfect hypocrite for most of the play, he tricks Orgon into leaving him all his possessions in his will. Only then does an external reaction take place. It is the king who acts as the omniscient Author this time, by exposing Tartuffe as a notorious villain who should have been beheaded long before. Thus, the double-dealing is condemned. Still, Tartuffe acted splendidly. His encounter with Orgon's family ends in his indisputable victory; also, his tragic end does not result from a mistake on his part, but rather serves Molière as a commentary.

Such a shift inside the same metaphorical structure stems from conjuring up partial metaphors that make up the complete metaphor. "The grand theatre of the world" focuses on going on and off stage and directing human activity in the world, whereas the parlour concentrates on the game, the acting that is supposed to guarantee social success and popularity. Thus, in the case of in-metaphor shifts, highlighting or hiding certain aspects is also based on systematising partial metaphors which together make up the more general metaphor.

## Experience as metaphor's interpretative context

Our description of the rules that obtain in interpreting metaphors merits at least a mention of the cognitive context, which the theory of relevance describes as experiential knowledge stored in memory. Lakoff argues that

> "no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis. For example, »more is up« has a very different kind of experiential basis than »happy is up« or »rational is up«. Though the concept »up«is the same in all these metaphors, the experiences on which these »up« metaphors are based are very different. It is not that there are many different »ups«: rather, verticality enters our experience in many different ways and so gives rise to many different metaphors" (*ibidem*: 19).

Thus, by identifying the experience that a metaphor is based on, one can interpret it adequately and, as far as possible, unambiguously.

A student's dissertation, written within the framework of cognitive semantics, discussed the set prepared for the staging of Balladyna, which was based on an up-down metaphor. Unconventionally, however, "up" had negative connotations, having to do with the spiritual world. Taking into account only the conventional understanding of verticality that our culture has adopted, it might be said that the performance under analysis here inverts the prototypical association of "up". The set, however, points to the source of the metaphor, thus justifying the suggested association. Let us look at a fragment of the interpretation that the dissertation contains:

> "The scaffolding placed on the stage, partially wrapped in plastic, through a simple, down-to-earth association suggest that the place has an unfinished, temporary character, possibly being subject to further processing. This is not really »refurbishing« or »reconstruction« – these imply

> the existence of an inspecting body overseeing the process and have positive connotations – but rather chaos, disturbance of order, uncertainty. This arrangement allows for a clear-cut division between human beings and spiritual characters. The upper levels are the area where spirits operate. The multidirectional reality of Goplana, Skierka and Chochlik deprived of a tangible centre and gravity, tends to expand and destroy existing structures. The area where people dwell, in turn, is marked by the horizontal floor, bringing to mind the image of a stable ground, a foundation".

The final comment from the student clearly indicates the source of the metaphor, that is the feeling of stability. The feeling we get supporting our feet on the ground runs counter to the feeling of instability and uncertainty that floating in space brings about. By identifying the source of the metaphorical image that describes the stage area one can draw further conclusions. When Balladyna acquires power she moves upward on the scaffolding. The upward mobility is not to be understood in a positive light as walking up a ladder of professional success, though; it is rather a form of protest against human nature, and as such causes fear and uncertainty. In the interpretation quoted here the student says that "Balladyna tries to impose her own rhythm upon an unfamiliar area, but her proud strutting, instead of the intended self-assurance, shows imminent realisation of unnaturalness; fear of heights, if you will".

The above comments about staging of *Balladyna* show that the logic of metaphorical interpretation is rooted in the experience that underlies a metaphorical image. The up-down relation is merely an isolated cognitive schema that becomes meaningful only through experience. Thus, "up" can have both positive and negative connotations. The ambiguity can only be clarified if additional information about the experience that forms the source of the up-down metaphor is obtained.

## The audience's individual experiences as a source of metaphorical conceptualisations.

As experience becomes a factor in the analysis of constructing metaphorical meaning, the individualised character of context as a reflection of our world knowledge comes to the foreground. Schemata that are universal in character become filled with meaning that stems from individual human experience. By saying "up is good" we all use the same spatial schema that has to do with the vertical way we are built, but individual experiences behind this generic observation may differ. For instance, human posture always shapes the "up is good" metaphor in the same way. A sick man is bed-ridden and thus horizontal; getting over an illness means getting up and reassuming the vertical position. However, not all of us have experienced mountain climbing, which is a frequently cited source for the "up is good" metaphor. Cultural differences are even more striking. Some will associate upward mobility with coming closer to God, others will express envy at the freedom that birds can enjoy up in the sky. All of these examples deploy the same idea of expressing "good" by going or being "up", but the range of individual experiences to do with the metaphor can help spot differences in its understanding once more detailed research into its character is done. In the reception of a theatrical performance, it does matter whether the upward movement of a character is

understood as going toward freedom or toward God. In Iwo Gall's staging of *Balladyna* a clear-cut stage division is perceptible: the right-hand part carries positive associations, whereas the left-hand side has negative connotations. In his interpretation Konstanty Puzyna argues that there might be several reasons for that division. In miracle plays, he says, the right-hand side represented heaven, the left-hand side being reserved for hell. He also mentions the dichotomy between "right" as "sunrise, birth, beginning" and "left" as "sunset, dusk, expecting the end" (Puzyna 1947: 6).

These concepts build up a metaphorical image that is necessary to appreciate the idea behind a given *mise en scène*. When Goplana conspires with Kostryn, mischief is brewing, as their talks take place to the left of the stage. Goplana's retreat from her kingdom (again, she goes to the left of the stage) brings to mind end-of-day associations; we feel as if her grandeur was becoming a thing of the past. If hell is the focal symbol, the metaphorical image loses its profundity; we are left with a somewhat shallow and literal conclusion that Goplana goes back where she came from, that is to hell. Thus, on the one hand, there is the coherent image of death being automatically linked with hell (with a certain degree of approximation), and on the other, with respect to individual staging solutions it does matter which of the source images is conjured up. If our interpretation is generalised at the level where "left" simply means "bad" and "right" stands for "good", we depart from the images suggested in Gall's staging.

Another reason why "left" is essentially negative is the phenomenon of right-handedness. The left hand is normally not as dextrous as the right one, which makes it inferior. "Right" is a polysemous word in English, meaning "opposite of left", but also "correct"; thus "right" evokes positive connotations. On the other hand, "having two left feet" means being clumsy. Polish has a number of expressions where the right hand appears to be clearly superior to the left one. However, this reason behind discriminating "left" does not apply to Gall's performance. When Goplana leaves her kingdom going left, she heads for her declining days, death, possibly hell. Without a shadow of a doubt, though, her action has nothing to do with having two left feet and therefore being unable to rule. In the context of the play a conclusion like that makes no sense at all. On balance, any interpretation must refer to metaphorical meaning. Generalisations like "left is bad, right is good" do not always give us a complete image of the metaphorical meaning of the reality shown on stage.

However, even if experience founding a metaphor is clearly determined, the metaphor can still be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on the recipient. A metaphor is not seen directly through the prism of its experience, but rather through the mental image that the audience have developed on the basis of that experience. These images are varied. To return to the metaphor from *King Lear*, where the kingdom is likened to a "sheet" washed by Regan and Goneril – bringing the concept of homeland low to the level of a household article handled in a usual, indifferent way is a feasible interpretation, but not the only one. A recipient who sees washing as a difficult and arduous chore will interpret the daughters' actions as an attempt at an exhausting, but unavoidable job. Alternatively, washing can be seen in a positive light as bringing dirty clothes back to their preferred, clean state; in this interpretation, the sisters would be taking on a laudable task of bringing back order in the whimsical king's realm. All these interpretations are verified by the plot, where eventually Regan and Goneril turn out to have meant mischief. However, watching the scene where the cloth is being folded, the audience are not yet ready to decide about the daughters' character, so the

metaphor is open to multiple interpretations. The ultimate interpretation of Regan and Goneril's behaviour, therefore, depends on the plot; in the course of the action one of the hypotheses that explain the metaphorical meaning of "washing the kingdom" will be confirmed.

Taking into account the individual character of experiences used in metaphorical conceptualisations does not have to lead to a subjective reception of the play. Individual experience of the recipient is subject to principles of relevance. If a given *mise en scène* focuses on the vertical ordering of the set, the audience will develop a mental image based on the same ordering. The meaning that the metaphorical image carries has to be justifiable in the context of the *mise en scène*, here – the characters' actions. In Gall's *Balladyna* the negative connotation of "up" was due to the hesitancy with which characters moved up the scaffolding. Thus interpreting a metaphorical image is far from being subjective. However, as the experience shaping a given metaphor is individualised, the audience can not only interpret the metaphor correctly, but also appreciate what they are watching in a more personalised way. Although not everyone has experienced the feeling of uncertainty which accompanies dishonest attempts at assuming power, all of us know what it is like to lose balance and what may happen if we fall down to the ground. Thus Balladyna's lot becomes considerably more familiar to the recipient, who, thanks to the use of a metaphor, can experience the bumpy road to power against the laws of nature.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to present metaphor primarily as a significant mechanism of cognition, in line with the very nature of appreciating a theatrical performance, a type of entertainment in which the audience can hardly stop to think about the meaning of events. Images come and go, so they can only be analysed *post factum*, and memory permitting. The audience cannot reconsider past events, as the plot goes forward and new events take place. This is not to say that theatrical metaphor is not interpretable in terms of aesthetic values, structural beauty and profundity of meaning. Such interpretations, though, only apply to *mises en scène* where events that are presented metaphorically span a longer period of time. For instance, all the actions of a character during a particular play have a metaphorical dimension. Also, if a metaphorical image is repeated a number of times, the audience can appreciate its complexity better. Kantor's and Mądzik's *mises en scène*, with repetitive or long-lasting metaphorical images, exemplify this issue quite well.

In drama, though, metaphors appear to serve but one purpose – to bring the fictitious world nearer the audience. This "approximation", understood as facilitating reception, does not preclude the existence of aesthetic values, which make the potential recipient interested in a work of art. According to what cognitivists say, conceptualisation is largely a subconscious process; therefore metaphors cannot function as concepts enhancing the pace of theatrical comprehension. A theatre researcher has to analyse conceptualisation in order to arrive at the motivation which ultimately shapes a given

interpretation. Thus relations between measures taken for a particular *mise en scène* and meanings which the audience assign to these measures can be determined. It is so because metaphorical images develop as the audience contrast what they see on stage with what they personally believe and know.

In line with Lakoff's model and analyses of metaphors presented in this dissertation, the following aspects of metaphorical conceptualisation can be singled out:

Metaphors form part of cognitive domains, in that they make up a network of interrelations. As this network is coherent and logical, a set of metaphors can be singled out to serve as a basis for everyday reasoning.

Metaphors are coherent because they are rooted in human experience by means of a source element. Due to that one can reason about more abstract concepts.

Metaphorical conceptualisation stems from contrasting cognitive contexts that make up cognitive domains in line with the principle of relevance. The following contexts are relevant to theatrical reception: stimuli received during performance, experience gained through everyday interaction with the outside world or knowledge acquired outside direct experience, as well as familiarity with theatre conventions.

In order to fully characterise theatrical metaphors one has to stress the fact that they can help broaden the range of ways in which a *mise en scène* can affect the audience:

- By presenting the same concept with the help of different metaphors certain aspects can be highlighted whereas others remain hidden.
- The possibility to make abstract meanings perceptible is quite particular to theatre, where a conventional code of visual signs corresponding to abstract meanings is a relative rarity.
- Referring to the audience's experience can help them comprehend unfamiliar or difficult matters.

Rooting the communicated message in the recipient's experience plays a significant role in terms of relevance, which here has to be balanced on a cost vs. benefit scale. By referring to experience, metaphor reduces the cost of comprehending events and images. The audience can thus make use of familiar knowledge, which is almost like home territory. Speaking of costs and benefits, it is worth mentioning there that the recipient assesses the potential difficulty in interpretation *prior* to conceptualisation, or at the very beginning of it. If, then, the content appears unfamiliar and complex, the audience may never try to comprehend it, as the expected intellectual effort may be too hard. An image which refers to an individual experience, in turn, appears more familiar an so easier to understand and encourages the audience to at least try to interpret it. The artistic dimension of metaphor makes the audience hope that the aesthetic experience will compensate for the effort they put into interpretation. However, individual metaphorical images should not be too difficult to interpret, even if the holistic meaning of the metaphor appears too complex. Plot developments require constant attention on the part of the audience, so pondering over a particular image may lead to overlooking some details that are of direct relevance to the overall meaning of the performance.

Thus, metaphor in theatre has to be interpreted in line with the principle of relevance and the calculation of costs and benefits. As Mieczysław Porębski aptly puts it, "in terms of connotation, everything is interpretable as long as you try hard". However, not all interpretations are worth the time and effort that the audience put into comprehending unexpected turns in the plot or strange objects and characters that appear on stage.

# DOES THE THEATER NEED A COGNITIVE REVOLUTION?

Cognitivism is sometimes referred to as a “revolution” that has created a new paradigm in science. A basic precept for the present thesis, Langacker’s definition of meaning is evidence enough of a fundamental change in the treatment of semantics. To reiterate, Langacker “equates meaning with conceptualization, which he broadly defines as a mental experience comprising both »new concepts and already existing ones, sensual and kinetic experiences, emotions, the ability to recognize an immediate context, social, physical and linguistic, etc.«. Conceptual content is thus only one element of meaning, which is complemented by the way in which the author of a concept formulates the content” (Tabakowska 1998: 168). Langacker’s definition is revolutionary not because it rejects its predecessors, but because it broadens significantly the scope of issues to do with the category of meaning. It thus seems that the nature of the new methodology is better captured in Tabakowska’s definition – cognitivism as a “rationalized intuition”. A great many cognitive and communicative processes are too elusive for strict formal analytic frameworks and in their description one has to make use of intuition as the source of the assumptions made. Thus established facts concerning the mechanisms of human perception, mental processes and their expression (e.g. verbal) transgress the boundaries of linguistic correctness or of any other code. It is fairly easy to see why cognitivists’ ideas are attractive for scholars interested in the reception of a theatrical performance, which, after all, transgresses the boundaries of what is proper or correct to an even greater extent than language. All this does not mean that that the meanings given to a performance by the audience are accidental and unpredictable. This is so because the motivation behind cognitive processes lies not only with the norms determined by a given system (code), but also with human cognitive capabilities, which become evident in the comments on or reactions to the events on stage. And that is exactly why I have so far analyzed other authors’ critical texts rather than used my own examples of interpretation – the main objective of the examples introduced has not been to demonstrate the possibilities the use of cognitive categories brings to the analysis of theatrical performance, but to prove that they constitute the basis on which every member of the audience draws his/her own interpretative conclusions.

The general nature of the signification model presented in this dissertation is also the result of the fact that the approach does not exclude the possibility of drawing conclusions on the basis of other models of interpretation. Semiotic analysis constitutes the part of the cognitive process whereby the recipient uses his/her knowledge stored as models and cultural code. In turn, Ingarden’s division of a theater play into layers

results from scholars' and hence recipients' practical need connected with the use of the phenomenological model. We could provide more examples showing how cognitivism interprets other theories of cognition. However, far more significant for a summary of the present considerations is pointing to the differences between the categories of the proposed model of the cognitive process and the akin semiotic and phenomenological issues.

Let us begin with reminding ourselves that cognitivism rejects communication models limited to decoding meanings and considers also such aspects as "new concepts and already existing ones, sensual and kinetic experiences, emotions, the ability to recognize an immediate context, social, physical and linguistic, etc." (*ibidem*). Within such an approach, the reception process begins not with the recognition of the sign, but with an ostensive activity consisting in focusing the recipient's attention, as a result of which he/she begins to look for relevance. Attention itself as an important communicative factor was also discussed by semioticians and structuralists, but within their approach attention was invariably connected with the selection and so hierarchization of signs. An act of ostension is however not always connected with pointing to a specific sign. In many cases the recipient's attention is drawn to a vague phenomenon in need of an interpretation, i.e. receiving a meaning. The nature of ostension thus allows to go beyond simple decoding and move towards constructing meanings, as well as to create new concepts and capture so far unknown phenomena.

At the same time, ostension acts are not limited to instigating the audience's cognitive activity but also actively impact the process of the origination of conceptual structures. Due to focusing the recipient's attention on chosen elements of the performance, ostensive activities to a large extent determine which conceptual structures become emphasized in the process of conceptualization as a profile against the cognitive base. Still, it needs to be remembered that the role of the recipient does not only consist in an automatic translation of the information reaching him/her from the stage, but also in its interpretation. The profile-base structure taking shape in the recipient's mind and responsible for the meaning of a given part of the performance, depends on both the arrangement of the dramatic elements and the spectator him/herself: his/her knowledge, way of reasoning and mental attitude. Profiling thus constitutes a basic dimension of scene construal; it defines the human "ability to »perceive« things in different ways and therefore to construct different conceptualizations" (*ibidem*). In Ingarden's theory a similar function is fulfilled by *wyglądy wyobrażeniowe*. To clearly differentiate both categories it is thus necessary to explain that they constitute different dimensions of scene construal. Whereas Ingarden's *wyglądy* define the perspective from which a given thing is "perceived", profiling defines the relation between the object of cognition and those elements of the semantic structure that are directly relevant for the characterization of a particular concept. The process of highlighting the profile against the base is also quite different from structuralists' hierarchical construction. The domination of an element of a performance over the other elements makes it possible to define an axis around which all the remaining signs are arranged in an order connected with the aesthetics of the play. Profiling in contrast is a mechanism of conceptualization as a part of the cognitive process.

The treatment of meaning as a process of constructing senses by the recipient requires the definition of an end towards which his/her efforts are geared. Within the

classic semiotic approach, the final result of the process of semiosis is the notion established by a convention. A proper analysis of relations between particular signs is bound to lead to the right meaning of an utterance or text. Yet, this idealized model does not reflect the actual process of interpretation. The same element of the performance can be interpreted thoroughly or only superficially, or looked at from a narrow or broad perspective. The strategy applied depends on the needs of the individual recipient. Explaining the same phenomenon to a child and adult we often characterize it differently, at the same time assuming that the meaning has been defined effectively. That is why, examining the way in which meanings are given to particular parts of a performance, one has to remember about relevance, based on the effort involved in advancing an interpretation and the benefits it brings. According to relevance theory, the process of constructing a meaning stops when the degree of understanding the phenomena being watched seems to be satisfactory for the recipient. This mechanism also explains why a more thorough analysis will not always be better. At some stage to achieve a deeper understanding requires much more involvement, which is unjustified in the context of the potential benefits of discovering new content.

Summing up, it needs to be pointed out that, embracing mental and individual aspects of reception, cognitivism in principle opposes the conceptual frameworks proposed by semiotics and phenomenology. It concurrently offers a solution intermediate between extreme subjectivism and objectivism. Meanings are born as a result of confronting by the recipient the information he/she gets with his/her ideas and convictions. The final effect therefore depends upon both the observed data and the cognitive capabilities of an individual. Total subjectivity of reception has been limited also because members of particular communities share a lot of the ideas and convictions used for individual interpretations. This is a natural consequence of universal rules of perception, as well as the process of social communication that allows to agree on (negotiate) a common set of conceptual devices defining relevant phenomena. Different spectators' interpretations are thus in a sense based on the same cognitive contexts, which makes it possible to compare individual ways of reasoning and, potentially, to work out a common interpretation, relevant for a given part of the performance.

Despite the clear differences between cognitivism and semiotics or phenomenology when it comes to characterizing conceptual categories, the approach towards analyzing the process of signification offered in this dissertation, an approach based on ostension, conceptualization and relevance, does not seem particularly novel. Numerous studies of the reception of theatrical performance make a different use of those very same categories in order to answer the following questions:

A – What does a particular recipient find as the most important?

B – Which elements of the performance does his/her attention focus on?

C – In what way does he/she interpret those elements?

D – What emotions do the events on stage evoke in the recipient?

E – In what way does he/she evaluate particular elements of the performance as well as its whole?

(Martin, Sauter *op.cit.*: 30)

At the cost of oversimplification it can be stated that questions A and B are connected with ostension, C and D with conceptualization, and D and A can be linked to relevance. One advantage differing the cognitive model from the earlier approaches

lies with the fact that it points to the interrelations linking particular aspects of reception. And that is why research into perception and emotional reactions can be related to the interpretations presented by the theatergoers. It thus becomes possible to move from empirical data to the world of meanings. Equally important for the theater scholar prove to be the findings of cognitive linguistics, a discipline concerned with identifying in linguistic forms reflections of the largely unconscious mental processes forming our way of reasoning and feeling. The analysis of the recipient's spontaneous utterances thus need not be limited to the immediate content of his/her statements, but can reach the motivation and strategies of reception that he/she is unable to describe or is unaware of.

The idea of examining the issue of meaning in the theater from the perspective of cognitive semantics is not meant only to satiate theater scholars' curiosity. The knowledge of strategies of reception allows to provide a more convincing interpretation of a theatrical performance. The explication of particular elements of the performance should not limit itself to defining meanings arbitrarily, but has to be geared towards making the listeners accept the interpretations as compatible with their own feelings, ideas and convictions arising after watching a play. That is the only way in which considerations about the meaning of a performance become an important part of the theatrical experience. And that is why the cognitive approach seeks not only to identify the subjective processes of the understanding of a theatrical performance by the recipient, but also makes it possible to link up the discourse used by theater scholars with a regular theatergoer's individual experience and emotions.

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